

## **Appendix H: Historic Properties and Resources**



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### **H. Historic Background: History of the Northern Branch**

#### **H.1. Introduction**

The rail line now known as the Northern Branch was originally the Northern Railroad of New Jersey and was built in the period from 1854-1859 as the six-foot gauge Northern Railroad of New Jersey (Refer to Figure H-1). The Northern Branch right-of-way currently extends from Bergen Junction, near Croxton Yard in Secaucus, New Jersey to Sparkill, New York, where it connects with the original Erie line from Piermont, for a total of 21.5 miles. The Northern Railroad of New Jersey was leased by the Erie Railway in November 1868 and later merged with the Erie Railway. Since that time, the line has been known as the Northern Branch of the Erie Railway (1868-1878); the New York, Lake Erie & Western (1878-1895); the Erie Railroad (1895-1960); the Erie-Lackawanna Railroad (1960-1976); Conrail (1976-2000), and CSX (2000-present). Passenger service on the Northern Branch was terminated on September 30, 1966. At the present time, the Northern Branch is operated by CSX for freight only.

#### **H.2. Charter and Construction**

Until 1840, travelers to New York, from what is known today as the Bergen County area, had to endure a three-hour trip by stagecoach to Hoboken, where they would board a ferry to cross the Hudson River for New York City. In that year, a railroad was built from Jersey City to the English Neighborhood in Ridgefield. The venture proved so successful that proposals to extend the line further north were submitted. John Van Brunt and Thomas W. Demarest, English Neighborhood residents, organized the Northern Railroad.

Henry Varnum Poor's *History of the Railroads and Canals of the United States* gives an accounting of the Northern Railroad's first financial year ending December 31, 1859. Thomas H. Herring was noted as President with the company's offices in Jersey City. The length of the railroad was stated as 21.27 miles from Bergen Junction, New Jersey to Piermont, New York. Sidings, turnouts, etc. added an additional 1.20 miles of road. The rolling stock consisted of two locomotive engines, six passenger cars and 17 additional freight and other cars.

##### **H.2.1. The Connection to the Original Erie Main Line in Piermont, NY**

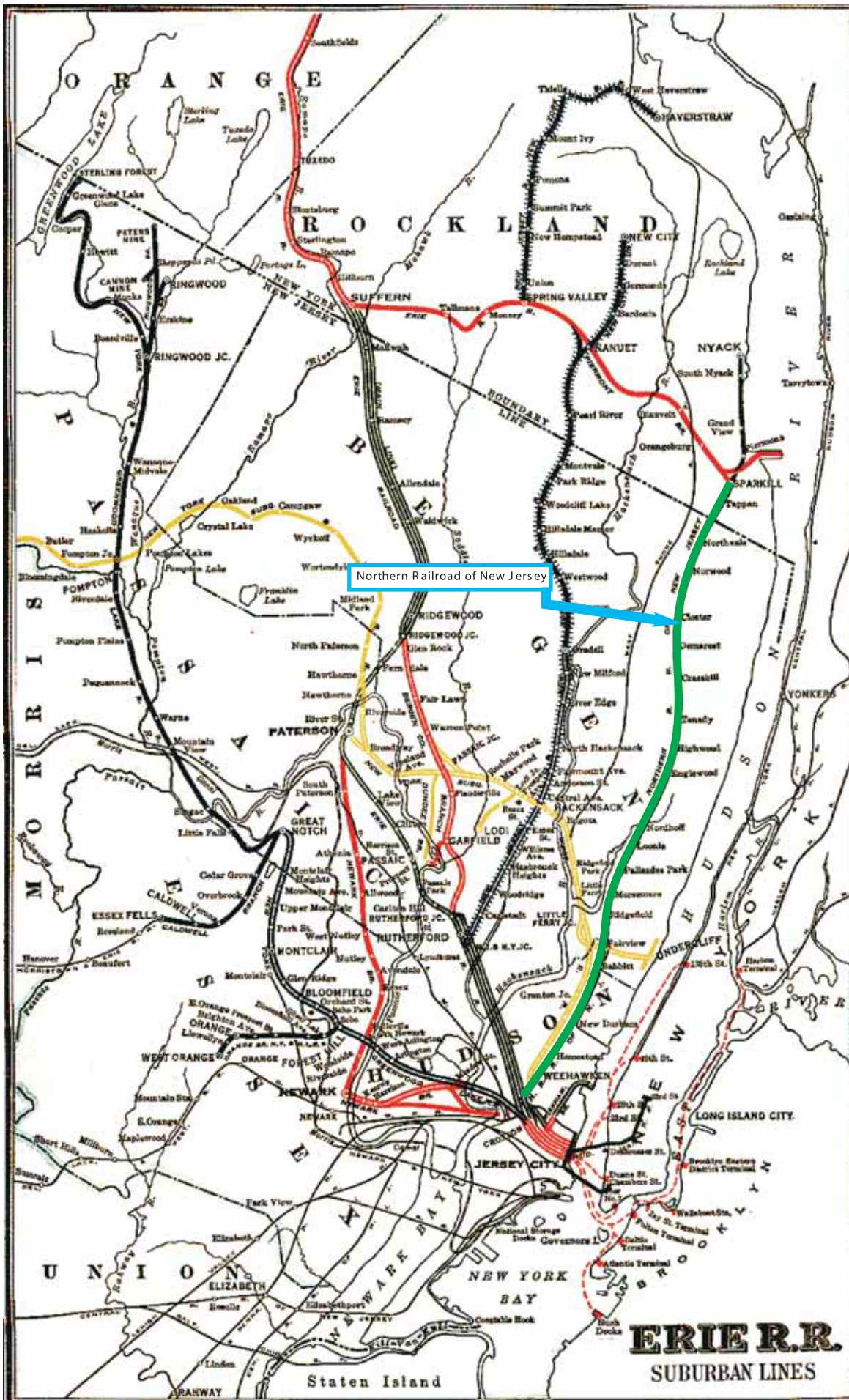
The Northern Railroad was completed on October 1, 1859 extending from Jersey City north to Sparkill where it connected to the New York & Erie's Piermont Line in Piermont, just across the border in New York State. The Piermont Line was the original Erie main line from Piermont to Suffern and points west.

At Piermont, Erie Railroad passengers would board a ferry to cross the Hudson River to Irvington. Because the Erie was built under a New York charter and New Jersey excluded it from entering the state, Piermont, below Nyack, twenty-five miles up the river from New York City, was the nearest point that the Erie could approach New York; the New Jersey state line is two miles south of Piermont. A long pier was built and Erie freight and passenger trains ran out over the river to the steamboat landing in deep water. The railroad attempted to overcome the serious lack of a New York terminal by making a fast steamboat connection. For a brief period in the mid-nineteenth century, Piermont served as the southern terminus of the Erie Railroad.

# ERIE SUBURBAN LINES MAP SHOWING THE NORTHERN BRANCH RAILROAD OF NEW JERSEY

Northern Branch  
Corridor

Figure H-1



Northern Railroad of New Jersey



Not to Scale



### H.3. The Northern Railroad into the Twentieth Century

In 1861, after the Erie had tunneled its way into Jersey City, the Piermont terminal was abandoned. As a result, the original Erie main line to Piermont declined; after 1862 it was no longer a destination even for freight (which had continued to Piermont even after the passenger trains were diverted), and after 1869 the railroad's shops also were relocated. In 1868, the Northern Railroad of New Jersey began using the Erie Railroad's Jersey City Terminal instead of the New Jersey Railroad & Transportation Station. On April 1, 1869, the Erie Railroad formally leased the Northern Railroad of New Jersey.<sup>1</sup> In fact, various sources suspect that the Erie was the economic source behind the Northern Railroad of New Jersey even before 1869. That could have been feasible, since the line was originally built with 6-foot gauge, which only the Erie and its subsidiaries used in this country.

In 1869, the Northern Railroad had six locomotives, 15 passenger cars, six baggage cars and 30 freight cars. Thereafter, its equipment was absorbed into the Erie's. It also had trackage rights over the Erie's Piermont Branch from Sparkill to Monsey, 10 miles west. From August 1869 to May 1870, the Nyack & Northern (later the more appropriately named Nyack & Southern) built its own 4.5-mile line from Sparkill to Piermont and north to Nyack. Upon completion, this line was leased by the Northern of New Jersey, making the 28-mile route from Jersey City to Nyack. As were all of the Erie lines, the Northern Railroad was re-laid to standard gauge in 1878 and by 1910, served a well-developed and growing New York City suburban area.

#### H.3.1. The Northern Railroad and the Development of Bergen County

The opening of the Northern Railroad in Bergen County precipitated a change from the rural, farm-based economies to suburban, residential communities. According to O'Brien, the line did not connect the existing towns, which consisted of landings along the Hudson River such as Huyler's, Closter Landing and Snedens, which all declined rail service when the railroad was built.<sup>2</sup> New towns, such as Closter, grew up along the line as former farmlands were developed by real estate speculators, eager to capitalize on the convenience of the new railroad. Handsome new railroad stations were constructed along the line and small hamlets grew near the stations, the seed of suburbanization laid.

##### *Ridgefield*

The arrival of the Northern Railroad of New Jersey in Ridgefield in 1859 made this area, with its hills providing scenic vistas, accessible to New York City and ripe for suburban development. Several persons with interests in the railroad lived in Ridgefield. They included Thomas H. Herring, who, according to Poor's Atlas, in 1859 was the President of the Northern Railroad.<sup>3</sup>

Ridgefield experienced slow, steady growth in the late nineteenth century. By 1876, it had about 40 buildings including a clubhouse, a store and a post office, a schoolhouse, a railroad depot, and two churches. Access increased when the New Jersey Midland Railroad (later the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railroad) was built through Ridgefield's meadows.

Development in Ridgefield accelerated at the end of the nineteenth century. Samuel F. B. Morse, the inventor, lived in Ridgefield, and by 1891 a sub-development was planned on the Morse Estate between Edgewater Avenue and Clark Avenue, east of Morse Avenue. Between 1899 and 1902, the streets of Morsemere Park had been built in the northern section of the borough. This development, which had its

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<sup>1</sup> William H Shaw. *History of Essex County, New Jersey* Vol. 1, p. 199, 1884

<sup>2</sup> Raymond J O'Brien. *American Sublime: Landscape and Scenery of the Lower Hudson Valley*. 1981, Columbia University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Varnum Poor, *History of the Railroads and Canals of the United States*, J. H. Schultz & Co., NY 1860

own railroad depot, was named in honor of Samuel F. B. Morse, inventor of the telegraph and the Morse code.

A number of real estate companies were active in Ridgefield in the early twentieth century. Besides the “new up-to-date Railway Station” and “elaborate street improvements constantly being put in, including sewers, gas, water, macadam, curb, gutters and sidewalks,” they were “offering beautiful building sites at modest prices and easy terms.”<sup>4</sup>

### ***Palisades Park***

The Northern Railroad traveled through Palisades Park near Overpeck Creek, but had little immediate effect on the future borough as it was many years before Palisades Park had its own railroad depot. In the 1890s, Palisades Park finally got its own train depot, built by Benjamin W. Hitchcock’s Hitchcock Land Improvement Company. This real estate company was a major factor in changing the area to a residential suburb.

### ***Leonia***

The Northern Railroad of New Jersey, with four passenger trains and one freight train, passed through Leonia daily en route south to Jersey City and brought a new influx of people and goods to the formerly almost self-sufficient community. Originally the station was called West Fort Lee or Fort Lee Station, but confusion with Fort Lee caused residents to adopt the name “Leonia” in 1865 when it became a village in Hackensack Township.

One of the effects of this increase in travel through Leonia was the provision of facilities to house the new population. While the arrival of the railroad encouraged a greater mobile population, it also invited new permanent settlement. New York, no longer the remote metropolis of the early nineteenth century, was the source of a wave of investors who bought land and established residences in Leonia in the 1860s. The “village” centered on the intersection of Grand Avenue and Fort Lee Road near the train station.

### ***Englewood***

The Northern Railroad’s chief engineer, along with New York lawyer J. Wyman Jones and a few friends, obtained control of six farms and mapped streets, and, on August 15, 1859, registered Englewood, the nucleus of the present city, in the County Seat of Hackensack. By 1887, the railroad had erected three stations in Englewood to accommodate travelers and businessmen; Van Brunts (later Nordhoff) in the south and Englewood and Highwood (near Ivy Lane) to the north. The 1884 Sanborn map of downtown Englewood shows the depot located on the west side of the railroad just north of Palisade Avenue.

### ***Tenafly***

When Tenafly’s ornate stone station opened in 1874 it quickly became the “pride of the village” and to this day, is one of the finest stations in the state of New Jersey. *The Place Called Tenafly* by David L. Wallace notes that Tenafly’s first neighborhood, the area immediately surrounding Highwood Avenue, was largely created by “prospecting parties” of the new railroad. Wallace notes that “a group of five men; two lawyers, one engineer, one speculator and one capitalist, combined their energies, enthusiasm and wealth” to create the Highwood Park Association. Among them were Charles Sisson, the engineer “who built the Northern Railroad,” John Lyle, a principal of Lord & Taylor, who purchased “lands on the western slope (of the village) comprising the entire holdings of an old-time farmer”, and George Huyler, once one of the town’s largest land-owners.

Other prominent boosters of this era included J. Hull Browning, who not only ran the Northern Railroad from 1875 to 1897, but “took a deep interest in the advancement and welfare of Tenafly.” These men and

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph H. Tillotson. *Hackensack and Northern Valley Directory*, Englewood, 1903.

other speculators used the railroad to promote the development of the farms and the forests into suburban communities. The Highwood Park Association also invited Col. A.G. Demarest, the Cresskill station agent and merchant, “to move himself and his supplies to this vicinity and establish a general store.” Col. Demarest established his general store a short distance from the depot and traded in groceries, boots and shoes, dry goods, wines and tea.

#### H.4. The Northern Branch Today

The Northern Railroad Company of New Jersey officially dissolved in 1949. The Erie continued to operate the line and later merged to become the Erie-Lackawanna in 1960. Like many other railroads across the country, a combination of national, regional, economic, political and transportation factors led to the deterioration of both passenger and freight rail services on the Northern Branch during the second half of the twentieth century. These changes led to the discontinuation of passenger rail service on the Northern Branch in the 1960s and a dramatic reduction in freight rail service.

##### H.4.1. Stations

Of the 15 stations that formerly comprised the Northern Railroad in New Jersey (Refer to Table H-1), only four remain intact. These stations are Englewood, Tenaflly, Demarest and Closter. Only two of these stations, Tenaflly and Englewood, are located in the Area of Potential Effect (APE) for the Northern Branch Corridor Rail Project.

**Table H-1: Northern Railroad Stations, circa 1910**

<b>Northern Railroad Stations</b>	<b>Approximate Milepost</b>
Homestead Station	6.0
New Durham	6.9
Babbitt	8.5
Fairview	9.3
Ridgefield	10.2
Morsemere	10.9
Palisades Park	11.6
Leonia	12.6
Nordhoff	13.5
Englewood	15
Highwood	16.1
Tenaflly	17
Cresskill	18.2
Demarest	20
Closter	22
Sparkill, (NY)	24.7
Grand View(NY)	27
South Nyack(NY)	28.5
Nyack(NY)	29
Piermont (Connection with the Erie Railroad)	Erie MP 25.8

*Source: Table Derived from Website: Syracuse University Library, Department of Special Collections, Erie Railroad Company.*

The former Tenaflly Station, located at milepost 17 on the east side of the tracks just north of Clinton Avenue, is located in the APE for the Tenaflly Town Center Station. The historic station, largely restored, is currently used as a café. The Tenaflly Railroad Station is listed on the State and National Registers of

Historic Places for its significance as one of the best examples of the Victorian Gothic style in New Jersey. The Englewood Station is located too distant from the proposed Englewood Town Center Station APE but is located along the railroad right-of-way and therefore, is in the APE for DMU Alternative 1 and LRT Alternative 2. However, the former Englewood Station, modified extensively for its current use as a recording studio, has lost much of its historic architectural integrity. The remains of the foundation for the former Leonia Station are located 150 yards south of Fort Lee Road in Leonia.

Demarest Station, built in 1872, is used as a community meeting hall, Closter Station is currently a private home, and the Erie Piermont Station in Rockland County, New York, was recently restored by the local historical society.

#### H.4.2. Bridges

Twenty-two bridges are located on the Northern Railroad of New Jersey in the Northern Branch Corridor Rail Project (Refer to Table H-2). Two of these bridges carry another rail line over the Northern Branch; one bridge is a pedestrian bridge, four of the bridges are steel girder highway bridges, and nine structures are culverts or small bridges. Five of the bridges are common examples of deck girder bridges and one bridge is a concrete deck slab bridge. None of the bridges are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

**Table H-2: Northern Railroad Bridges within the Northern Branch Corridor Rail Project**

Bridge Name/Location	Date
1. CSX River Line Bridge over CSX Northern Branch, MP 7.58	c. 1904-1917
2. CSX Northern Branch over Bellmans Creek (1), MP 8.21	n.d.
3. NYS&W Edgewater Branch over CSX Northern Branch, MP 8.25	1893
4. CSX Northern Branch Bridge over Bellmans Creek (2), MP 8.51	1927
5. CSX Northern Branch Bridge over Wolf Creek, MP 8.61	1887
6. Pedestrian Bridge over CSX Northern Branch, MP 8.86	n.d.
7. Hendricks Causeway Bridge over CSX Northern Branch, MP 9.29	1931
8. CSX Northern Branch Culvert 1 over Drainage Ditch, MP 9.79	n.d.
9. U.S. Route 46 Bridge over CSX Northern Branch, 10.05	1930
10. CSX Northern Branch Culvert 2 over Drainage Ditch, MP 10.16	n.d.
11. CSX Northern Branch Culvert 3 over Drainage Ditch, MP 10.93	n.d.
12. CSX Northern Branch Culvert 4 over Drainage Ditch, MP 11.06	n.d.
13. CSX Northern Branch Culvert 5 over Unnamed Stream, MP 11.54	n.d.
14. CSX Northern Branch Culvert 6 over Moore's Creek, MP 11.89	1929
15. CSX Northern Branch Culvert 7 over Unnamed Tributary to	n.d.
16. Interstate 95 over CSX Northern Branch, MP 12.51	1962
17. CSX Northern Branch over Flat Rock Brook, MP 12.54	1960
18. CSX Northern Branch Culvert 8 over Drainage Ditch, MP 12.75	n.d.
19. NJ Route 4 Bridge over CSX Northern Branch, MP 12.86	1931
20. CSX Northern Branch Bridge over Overpeck Creek, MP 14.83	1887
21. CSX Northern Branch Culvert 9 over Unnamed Stream, MP 16.05	n.d.
22. CSX Northern Branch Bridge over Tributary of Tenakill Brook, MP	1953

Source: Conrail List of Undergrade and Overhead Structures, January 1, 1982

### **H.4.3. Eligibility**

The Northern Railroad of New Jersey is not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places due to a loss of historic architectural integrity. Only four of the original 15 stations on the Northern Railroad in New Jersey remain intact, one of which, Englewood Station, has been extensively modified for use as a recording studio and has lost its historic architectural integrity. In the Northern Branch Corridor Rail APE, the only architecturally intact railroad station is the State and National Register listed Tenafly Railroad Station. Of the twenty-two bridges located on the Northern Railroad of New Jersey in the Northern Branch Corridor Rail APE, constructed between 1887 and 1962, none date back to the original 1859 construction of the railroad and only three bridges date from the nineteenth century. Nine of these crossings are simple concrete culverts and nine of the bridges on the Northern Branch were constructed in the twentieth century. All of the bridges on the Northern Branch are common examples of highway, railroad or pedestrian bridges, and none are individually eligible, nor are they eligible as a whole. Therefore, the Northern Railroad of New Jersey does not embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, nor does it represent the work of a master or possess high artistic values. The Northern Railroad also does not represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.