

there was always the great old "Central Railroad of New Jersey" with its mammoth steam engines loudly puffing away as they slowed into the Fanwood station, or chugged their way up the slight incline as the tracks lead toward Westfield. It was not unusual, if you lived in Fanwood, to find small specks of soot, from the coal used on the trains, in and about your home. Riding on the "Jersey Central" on a hot summer day, you almost had to open wide the windows, and then you really found out what soot was all about! I found that out years later, when I commuted on them myself.

When I was very young, sometimes my father, to my great delight, would take me in to New York with him on a Saturday morning (when Wall Streeters worked half-days on Saturdays). What a treat it was to ride the train. There was this brightly-colored commutation ticket that the uniformed conductor would come around and punch. And those trains were ON TIME.....each conductor lived by his pocketwatch. They'd stride through each train car just prior to its next stop, calling off the names of the towns, lest any passenger sleep through his destination.

Often too, people would use the train just to go to the next town! My mother often took me on it to Plainfield. My grandparents lived there, and once alighting from the train, we still had to take a bus, in order to get to their house, but we thought nothing of it. In fact, of course, to me it was a great adventure. I can remember being in such awe.....Here was this gigantic train, and you were not only "allowed to", but had to walk right out onto the coarse gravel, near the tracks, in order to board it! The kindly conductor would always be there to help you on, stopwatch in hand. "BOAAARRRRRD," he'd loudly announce.

Waiting in the Plainfield station, on our return trip home, we'd watch people pass the time with various coin-operated games. One was a glassed-in affair with miniature animated baseball players which played out the game at the insertion of your coin. It seemed that all the stations, including Fanwood's, were heated in winter via a pot-bellied stove. Going way back, I remember Mr. Staples, there at the window of the north-side station house, where he operated the Western Union telegraph machine.....clickity-click, tappity-tap-tap-tap.

In the early days, the pedestrian overpass crossing the Fanwood tracks was built of heavy, dark, probably creosoted, wood. It eventually burned down in quite a spectacular fire, and was replaced by the concrete structure, improved upon over the years, which stands today. It truly boggles the mind to think of how many bustling footsteps have crossed that span since it was first erected!