Manchester's Railroads

The Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad

John Gillmor's original vision for Manchester in the early 1850s included a rail connection just as rail infrastructure was being started in Michigan. Gillmor was instrumental in developing Michigan's first railroads. In 1853, he convinced the Michigan legislature to appropriate $20,000 to connect Detroit to Jackson via New Buffalo, Kalamazoo, and Battle Creek, but the route was never built.

Manchester was becoming a state in 1835. The town was developing for several railroad lines running across the state. The southern roads would connect from Monroe to New Buffalo and the central road would connect Detroit to St. Joseph. By the late 1850s, many of these lines were already underway to connect these three railroads with a north-south rail route through Manchester. This connection was completed in 1855, and the second railroad was built from Pontiac to Milan through Manchester in 1861 during a period of strong economic growth and promotion for both regions.

From an early age, railroads were a major part of life in Michigan. Many people went to visit their grandparents, to play on the neighboring trains, and to ride on the cars. By the early 1860s, railroads employed more workers than any other industry in the United States.

The Detroit, Hillsdale and Indiana Railroad

Manchester's second railroad also operated under the aegis of the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad. It was constructed in 1864 after a large fire destroyed the city. Many business and industrial interests were active in the area, including the Detroit and Houghton Lake Railroad, which connected Jackson to Lake Michigan.

The line ran through northern and western Michigan, connecting the towns of Houghton and Ishpeming. It was originally built as a narrow-gauge line, but was later converted to standard gauge in 1873.

The line was known as the "Kalamazoo Cut," after John B. Kent from whom the property was purchased. The original line was extended to Battle Creek in 1881 and to Kalamazoo in 1891. The line would eventually be converted to a double-track line.

The Two Railways Vision

The installation of the second rail line through Manchester was a significant civil achievement, and was meant to connect and expand Manchester's economic growth. A 19th-century railroad town, running in all four directions, was a major public relations bonanza, and was meant to attract new business and residents to the area. The line was constructed in the late 1850s, and the railroad staff and tracks were laid off to private parties after 1860.

The original US & W depot built in 1853 and freight yard were located near 421 W. Main, the current site of the Manchester Market and a large open field.

A new, larger depot built in the 1880s.

The line's track grade was so steep that the trains had to be hauled up by the crew.

The first train on the road came through on September 22, 1835, heralding Manchester's unique role as the only local town with two railroads. The Manchester Enterprise wrote many articles trumpeting the work project and its completion, including Figure 8, highlighting "trucks for the line" to be delivered in three months in Manchester.

The line would eventually be upgraded to a double-track line.

Manchester experienced strong economic growth and prosperity during and immediately after the Civil War, resulting in major commercial and industrial developments in the town and rapid population growth. On April 2, 1869, the Michigan Senate passed two bills to create a new line of railroads that would run through the city. These bills were to be funded by bonds issued by the city, which would be repaid over time.

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The line is shown on the map of the lake shore and michigan southern railroad.