



# **Envisioning Railroad Avenue Development the Passenger Depot and Area Industrial Growth**

by

**Mike Harrold**  
**Industrial Survey Volunteer**

Amesbury Carriage Museum  
Amesbury, MA

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# Empty Railroad Avenue & Carriage Hill – 1854

there is little adjacent to the railroad or between the railroad and Elm Street



1854 Clark Map

The railroad had been in town for only six years in 1854. Textile mills were along the Powow River for waterpower, which pulled the railroad depot close by on Water Street. Railroad Avenue, Chestnut, and Oakland Streets did not then exist. There were houses and shops along Elm Street, but Washington St. was about the only intrusion into the space between Elm St. and the railroad. Early carriage industry was spread throughout various neighborhoods and only after the Civil War did it expand into this area. Aaron Hilton was just developing his property during the early 1850s, starting with an unpowered lard oil mill and orchard plantings. A reportedly tired and unsightly railroad depot perhaps functioned better for freight handling than for commodious passenger service, so that by the early 1870s a new passenger depot had been proposed that would be located near the relatively new Railroad Avenue, off Elm Street.



# Railroad Ave., Carriage Hill, & Proposed Depot – 1872

Railroad Ave. area remained relatively empty during the 1870s and well into the 1880s.



Jacob R. Huntington  
1869 carriage factory  
on Chestnut Street

Aaron Hilton's shoe  
manufactory

Proposed passenger  
depot

Original depot on  
Water St. at end of  
single track

Jacob R. Huntington built the town's largest carriage factory on both sides of Chestnut Street in 1869. He sold that to James Hume in 1875, who later sold it to Frank A. Babcock in 1885. Aaron Hilton had shifted to craft production of children's shoes. The proposed passenger depot was moving forward so that by 1871 the railroad had contracted to fill some land between the tracks and Elm St. to receive a new depot<sup>1</sup>. That land was lower than the tracks partially because some of the earth had been moved to create the elevated railbed.

1) Amesbury & Salisbury Villager, June 21, 1871, pg. 2



# Railroad Elevation Across the Railroad Ave. Area

Horizontal red line is at railroad track elevation from Water St. to Chestnut St.

Passenger depot & parking structure

Railroad Ave. area is below railroad grade

Chestnut St.



Foundation of German AutoSport building is well below railroad grade

The driving surface of the parking structure top level is at railroad grade, with a surrounding wall a bit higher, and supported on columns in the lower level.

Houses seen across from the depot and tracks on page 21 were likewise supported on pilings extending up from the ground below.

German AutoSport resides in the footprint of the N. H. Folger factory (pgs. 18 & 20), except that the Folger building extended further out over Back River.

The Chestnut St. crossing is at the basic level of "Ghost Trail" terrain from Salisbury over to Amesbury.

Because railroads maintain mild grades for easy hauling, this set the elevation for depots on Water St. and Railroad Ave., and for the top of the elevated railroad berm that bisected the Railroad Ave. area. The berm remains to the right of the German AutoSport driveway, but has been removed near the Senior Center.

Chestnut St. did not cross the railroad tracks until after ca. 1950

# Dodge & Gott Steam Gristmill, 1876

E. W. Bigelow 1880 aerial map drawing



Dodge & Gott (aka Powow Grist Mill), with a 100 HP steam engine, began Railroad Ave. industrialization in 1876, built by Albert Dodge (of the family noted by Dodge Street of Beverly), and demonstrating the agricultural nature of Amesbury. Dodge also had mills in Gloucester, Hyde Park, and other cities with railroad service, plus wholesale flour and grain distribution in Boston. He had moved to Beverly from New Hampshire to run a cousin's grist mill, then relocated to Gloucester where he operated two tidal grist mills and married Miss Abba Gott of Rockport. At right in the above picture is a long coal bunker adjacent to the tracks.



# New Passenger Depot on Railroad Ave. – ca. 1878

Viewed from the trestle over Back River, with a single track and wide walkway



Stereopticon card found on ebay

Surrounding terrain drops off along both sides of the raised railbed, requiring added fill to support the depot. The fill was removed when the Folger & Drummond factory was later built on the depot site, so that the first two stories of that factory were below railroad grade. The same was true for other factories adjacent to the railbed. The white 3½ story wood building seen left of the depot was a carriage repository on Chestnut St. hill for Edwin Morrill, whose factory was at Laurel Place on Point Shore.

# Amesbury's New Passenger Depot, Late 1870s-1880

Migrating through the area bounded by Water St., Railroad Ave, & Elm St.

ACM volunteer Tom Murphy's 2018 article described moving the railroad passenger depot (now Crave Restaurant) from its initial location near Railroad Ave. (seen in this picture) to its current place on Water Street. The Eastern Railroad had been constructed along the coast during the late 1830s from East Boston up to Portland, Maine. The Amesbury Branch was proposed to the General Court in 1843 led by textile mill agent, James Horton.



Being approved, it appears that locally raised capital of about \$70,000 was paid to the Eastern Railroad to survey the line in 1846 and finish construction by late 1847<sup>1</sup>. Intended primarily for delivering raw textile materials and shipping out finished fabric, the railroad terminal best served on Water Street. The rail line was consequently at the elevation of upper Water Street, which is higher than the Railroad Ave. area on the other side of Back River (which flows out under Elm St. at the corner of Clark Street). The Railroad Avenue area was thus bisected by a 30-foot earthen railroad berm made of soil brought in and/or gathered from surroundings, including out of Back River and creating the steep riverbank seen above. This bank is still visible on the right side of the driveway into German AutoSport off of lower Chestnut Street.

1) A History of the Salisbury Branch, Part 1, pg. 1, Salisbury Point RR Historical Society

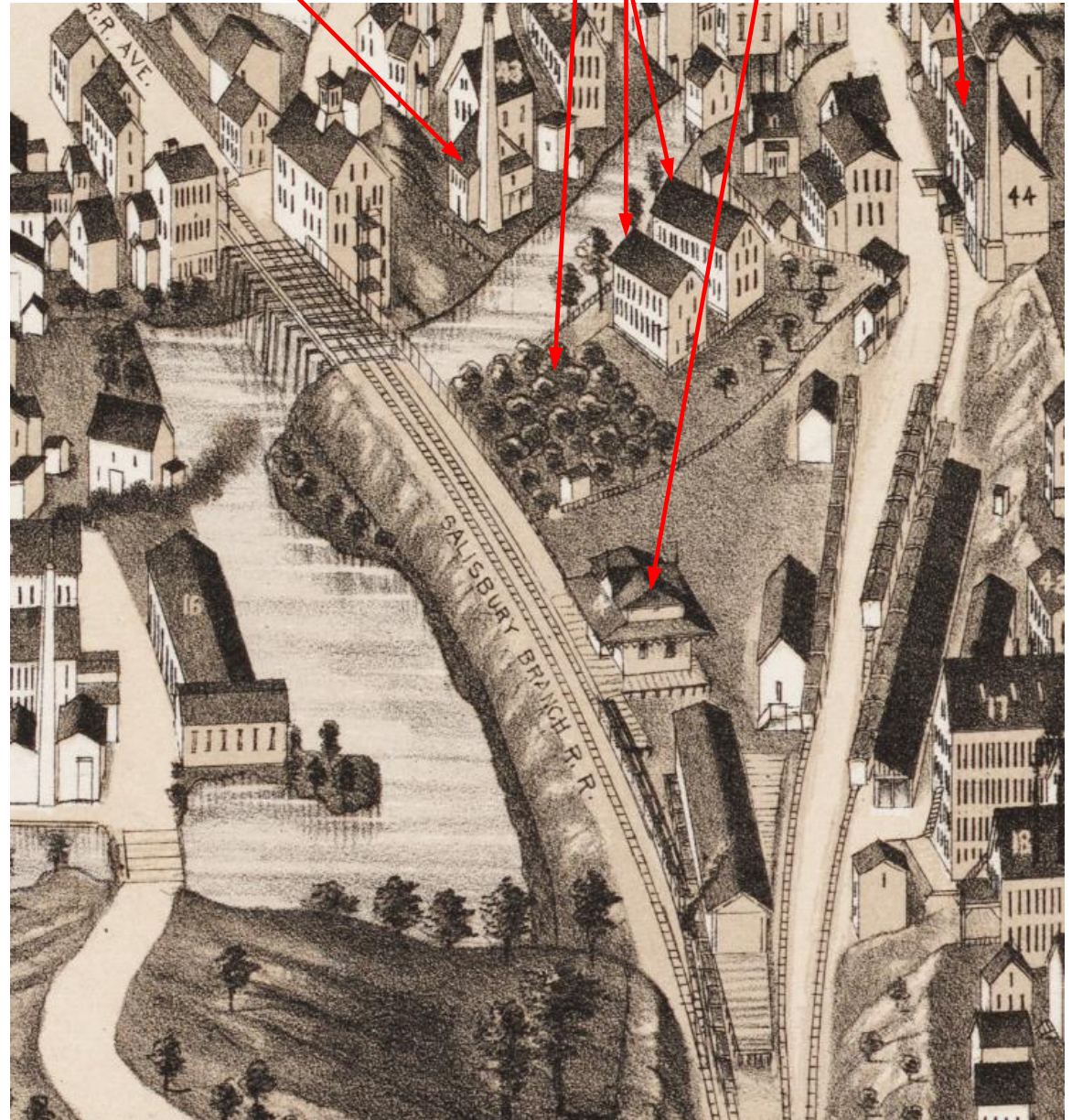


# Railroad Avenue Area, Late 1870s-1880

Aaron S. Hilton owned a low-lying tract abutting Back River and the rail bed that he had drained and tilled from wild for agriculture. There were two buildings for craft manufacturing plus some rental living space for workers. He had an orchard plus strawberries, grapes, and tomatoes, selling vines and even wine, and exhibiting at fall agricultural fairs.

Across Back River between Ring and Elm Streets lived Enoch Osgood and father-in-law Moses Bailey, who both owned land adjacent to Hilton's in the Railroad Ave. area that they also used for agriculture. Osgood had operated a machine shop in the building marked #43 at right. Bailey's Railroad Ave. land was sold at probate in 1859 and developed, after which two of his sons carried on carriage making in the old Osgood shop, which by 1880 was a carriage factory run by George J. Hunt.

Enoch Osgood's  
machine shop     Hilton's orchard &  
shoe factory     Passenger  
depot     Dodge &  
Gott



1880 Aerial map published by E. H. Bigelow of Framingham, Mass.

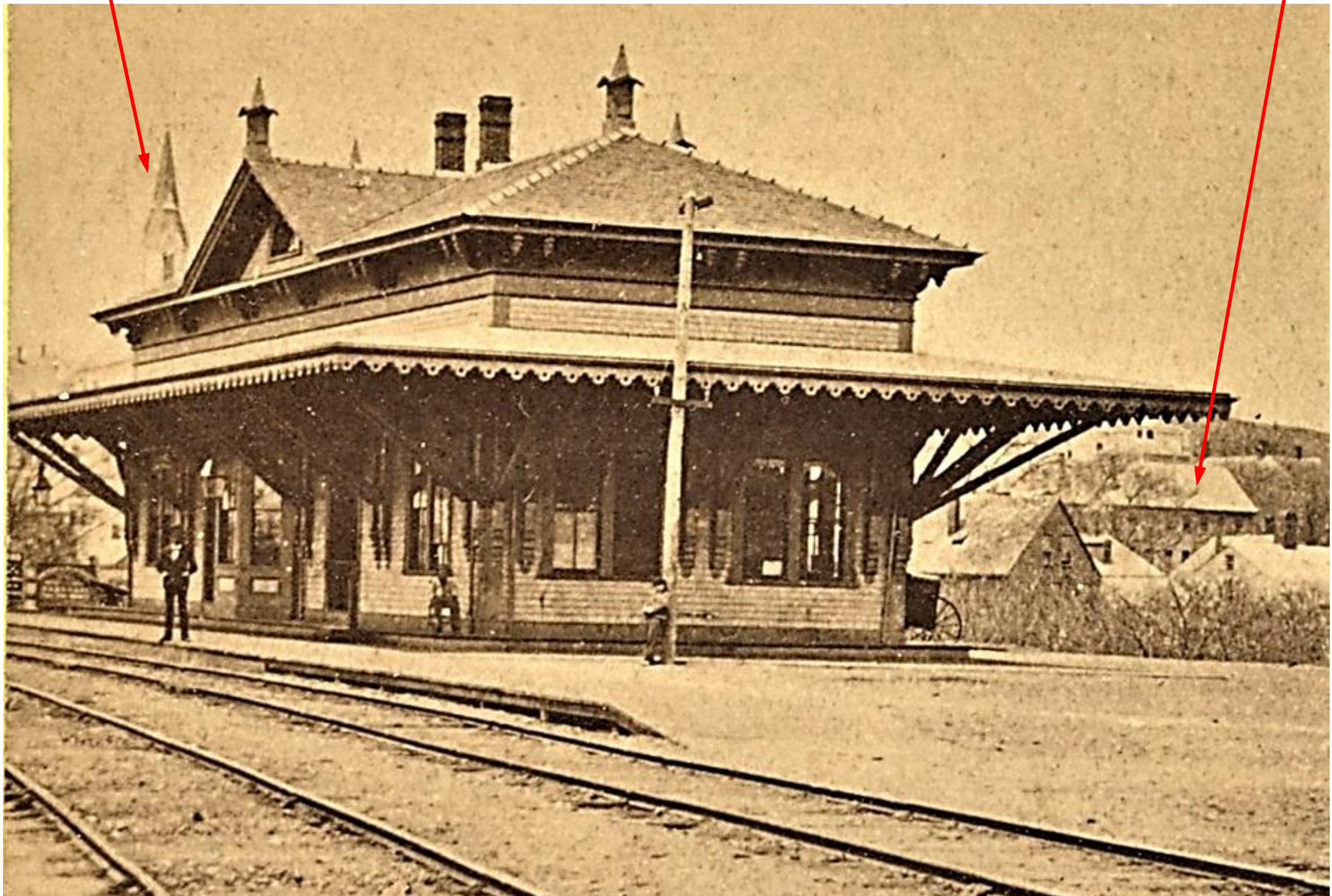


# New Passenger Depot on Railroad Ave. – ca. 1880

Built around 1873-4 in the current rear parking lot of the Senior Center

Baptist church steeple

Foster Gale's carriage factory on Clark St.

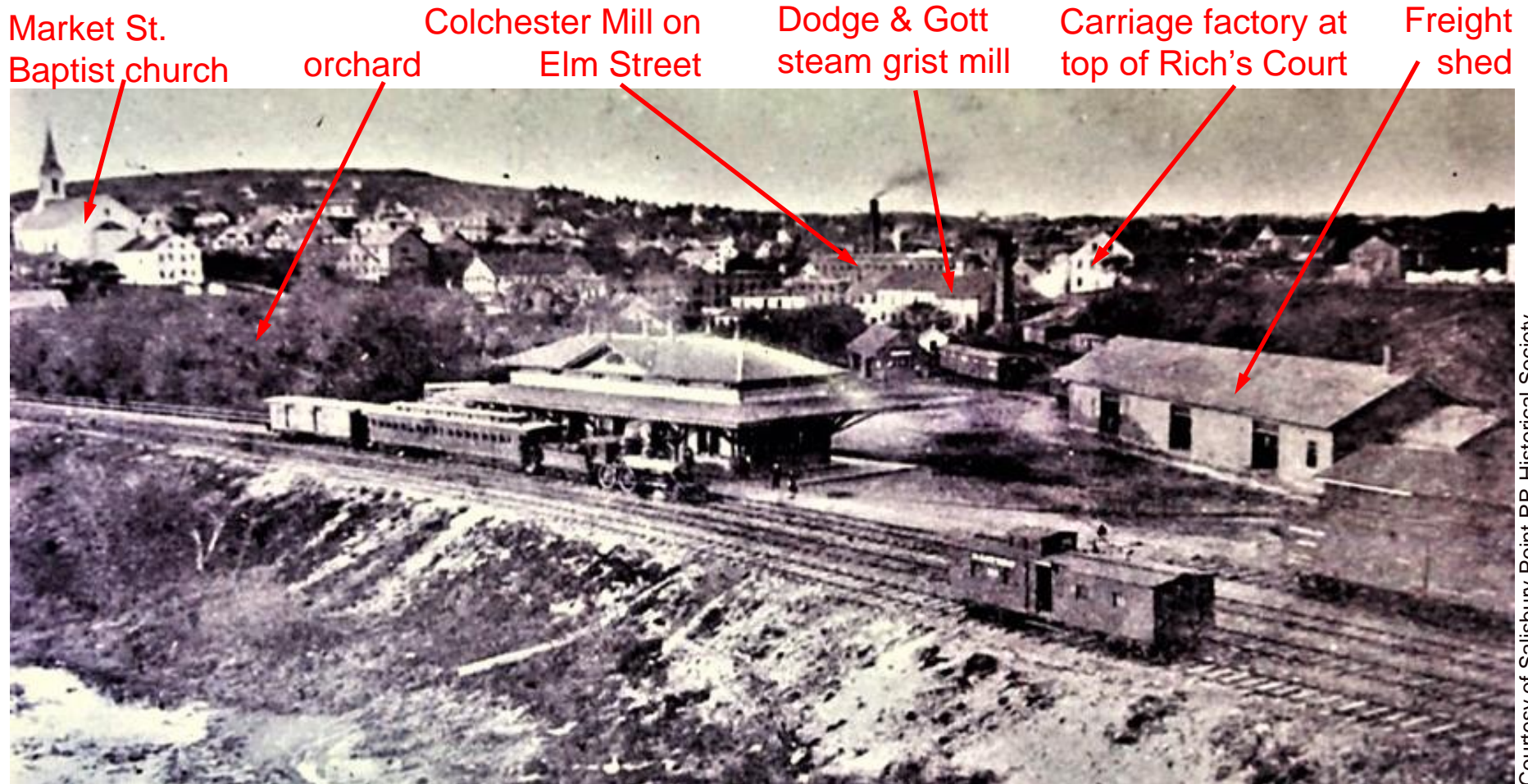


Courtesy of New York Public Library



# The Passenger Depot on Railroad Ave. – ca. 1883

An elevated view that can only be from the 1882 Biddle & Smart building

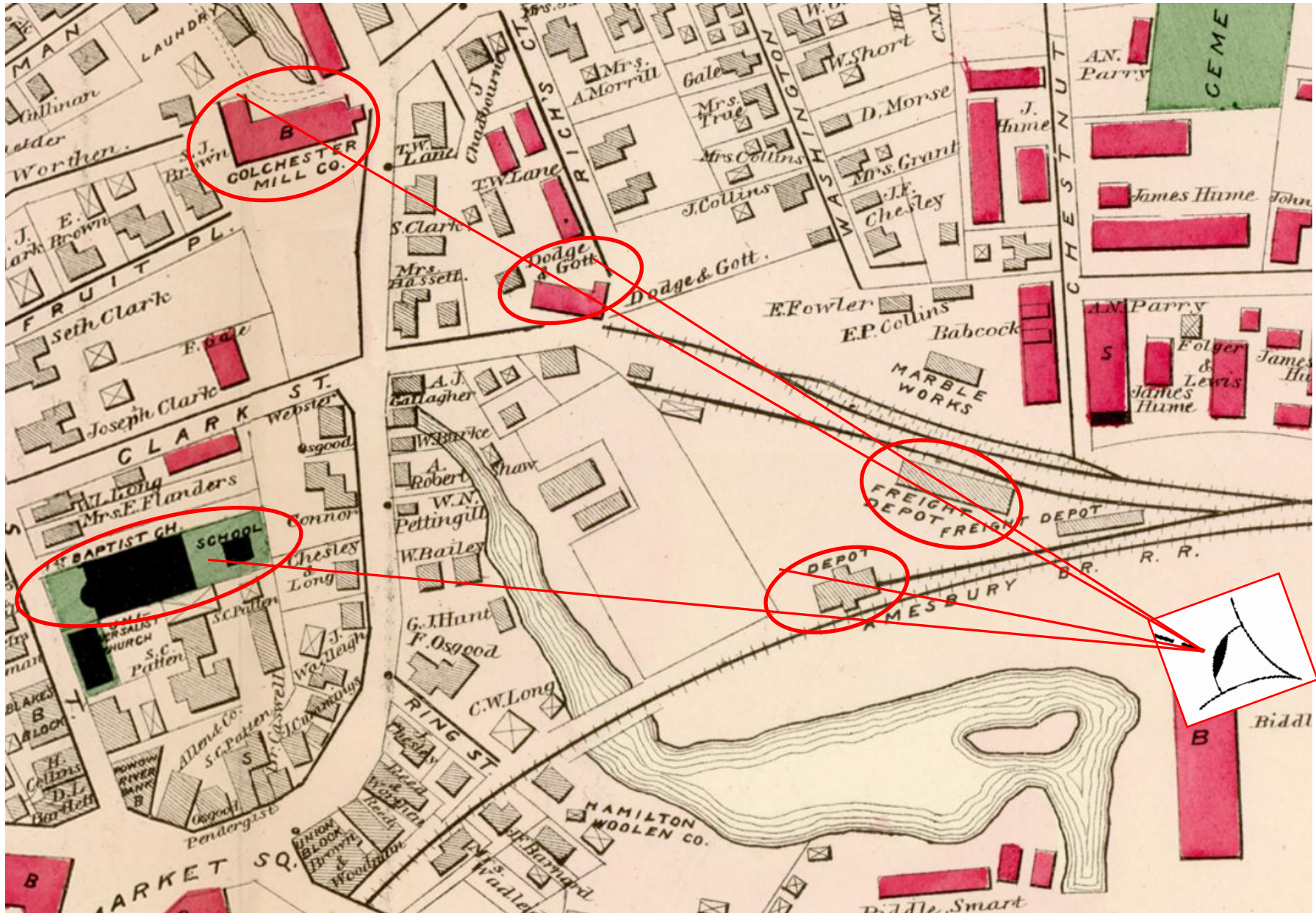


The recent partnership of William Biddle and William Smart had constructed in 1882 a 4-story 200-foot-long brick factory in what is now lower Chestnut Street that afforded this view of the Railroad Ave. area. Hilton's orchard resides in the low area left of the depot with a treeless Powow Hill in the far background. The steep drop-off runs along Back River such that future factories built adjacent to this side of the railroad tracks were on pilings driven into the riverbed.



# Water St., Railroad Ave., & Elm St. – 1884

viewing from 1882 Biddle & Smart building, located in current lower Chestnut St.  
see previous page





# Inbound View of Original Depot Location – 1883-4

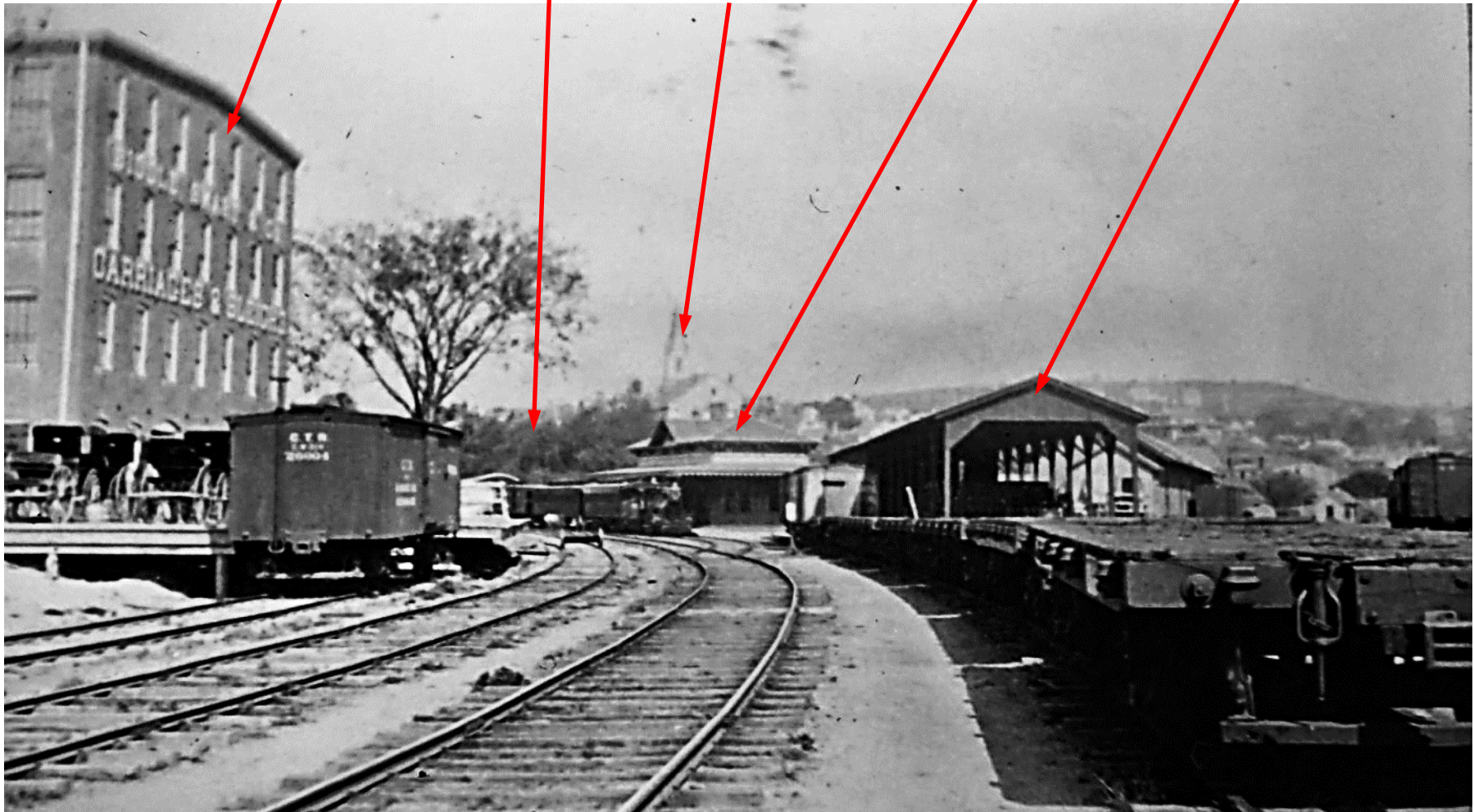
1882 Biddle & Smart building

orchard

Baptist Church

Passenger depot

Freight shed



Courtesy of Salisbury Point RR Historical Society

The passenger depot in its original location across Back River near Railroad Avenue, before being moved in 1887 to its current location off Water Street. The four-story Biddle Smart & Co. building at left was then the largest carriage factory in New England. The freight shed at right housed carriages ready for rail shipment.



# “Ghost Trains” along RR Ave. Freight Sheds – 1883-4

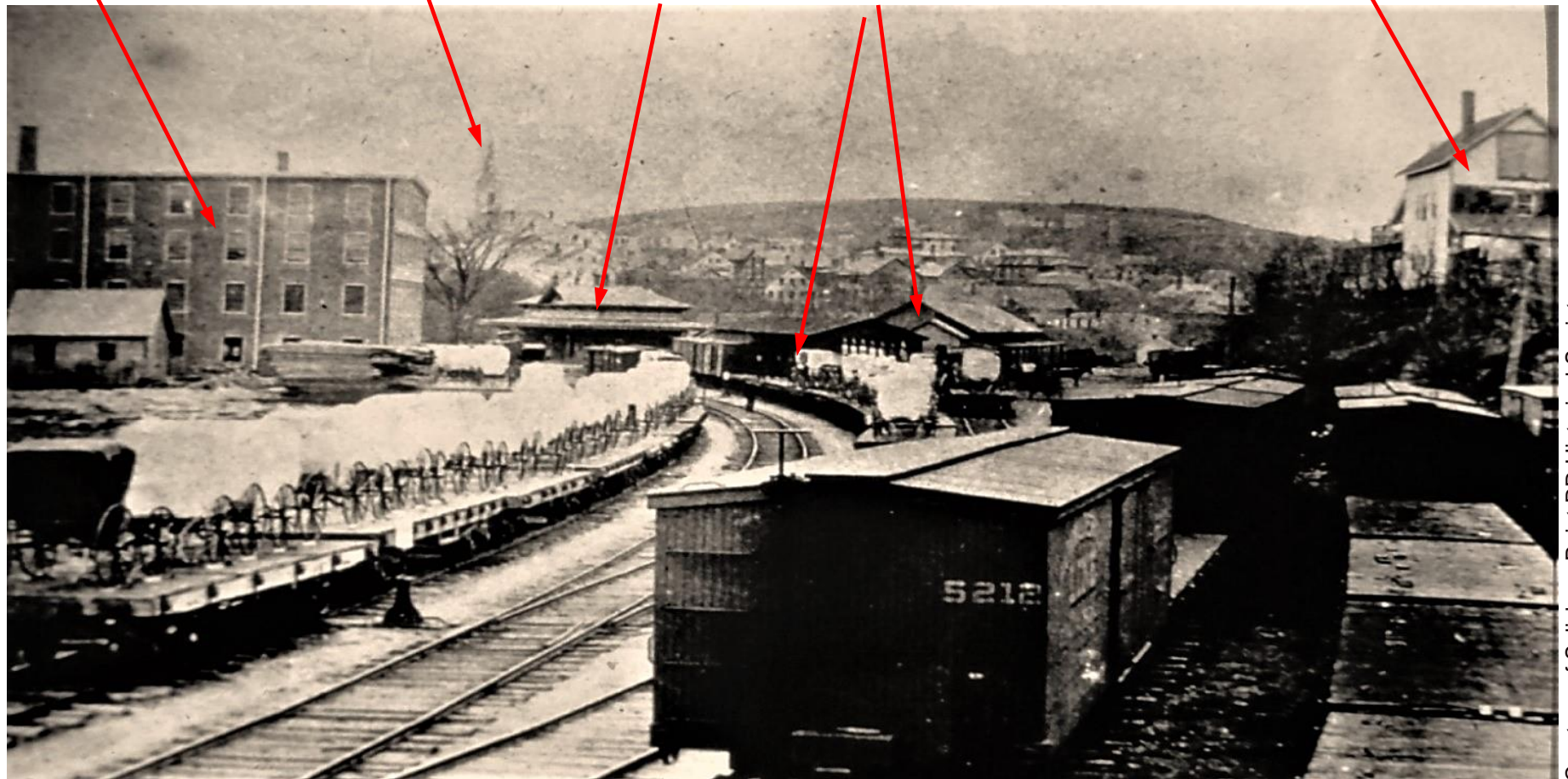
1882 or later, but prior to the 1884-5 removal of the white carriage building

1882 factory

Baptist church

Depot

Freight sheds



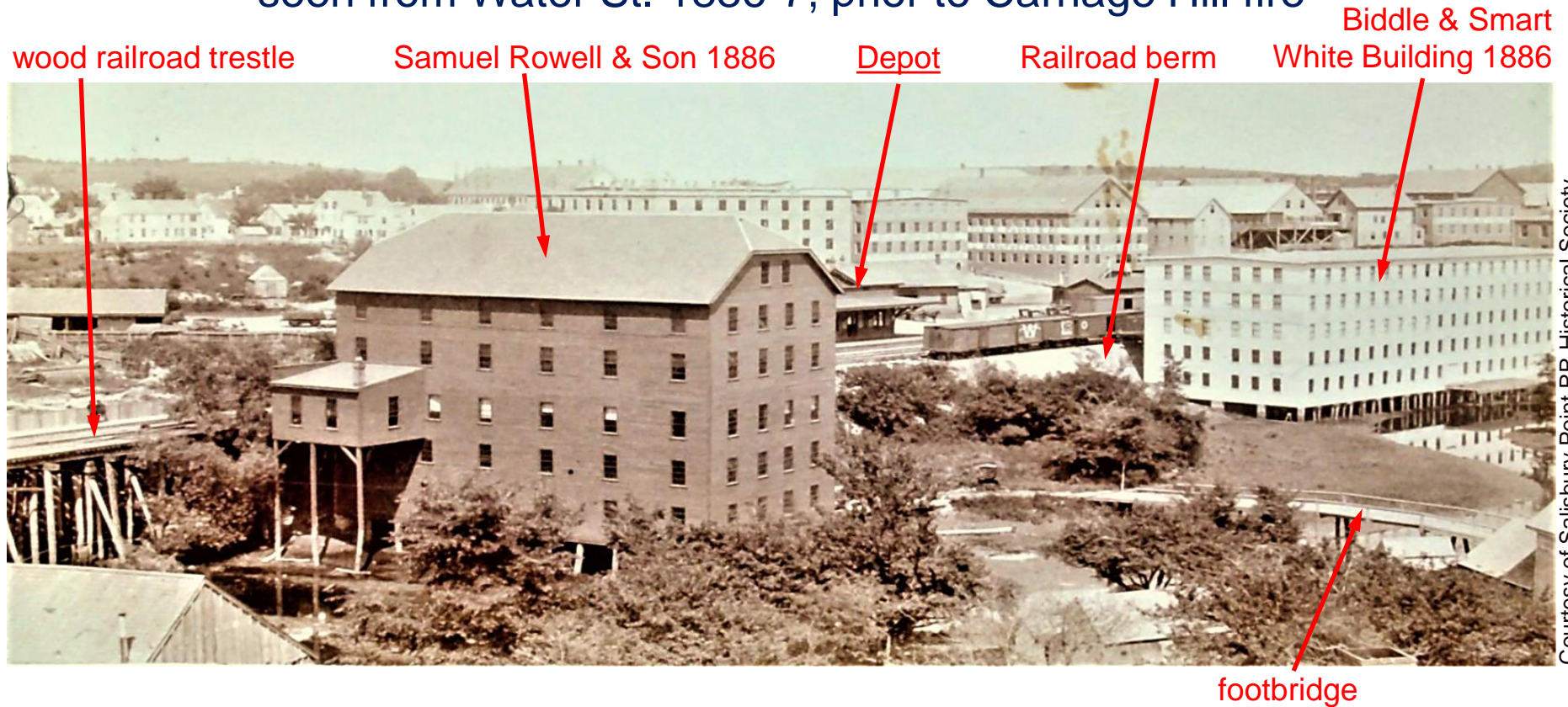
Courtesy of Salisbury Point RR Historical Society

The railyard split into two sets of tracks. Several tracks went to the left but only a single track all the way to Water Street and the current depot location. To the right were two tracks up along Railroad Avenue. This photo looks up the Railroad Avenue branch toward Dodge & Gott. The white carriage building, an early (ca. 1878) addition to Carriage Hill (further right), is the Edwin Morrill repository seen previously on Page 5. Frank Babcock replaced it with a larger brick factory along Chestnut Street, see 1884 map on page 10.



# Developing the Water Street Side of the Railroad Berm

seen from Water St. 1886-7, prior to Carriage Hill fire



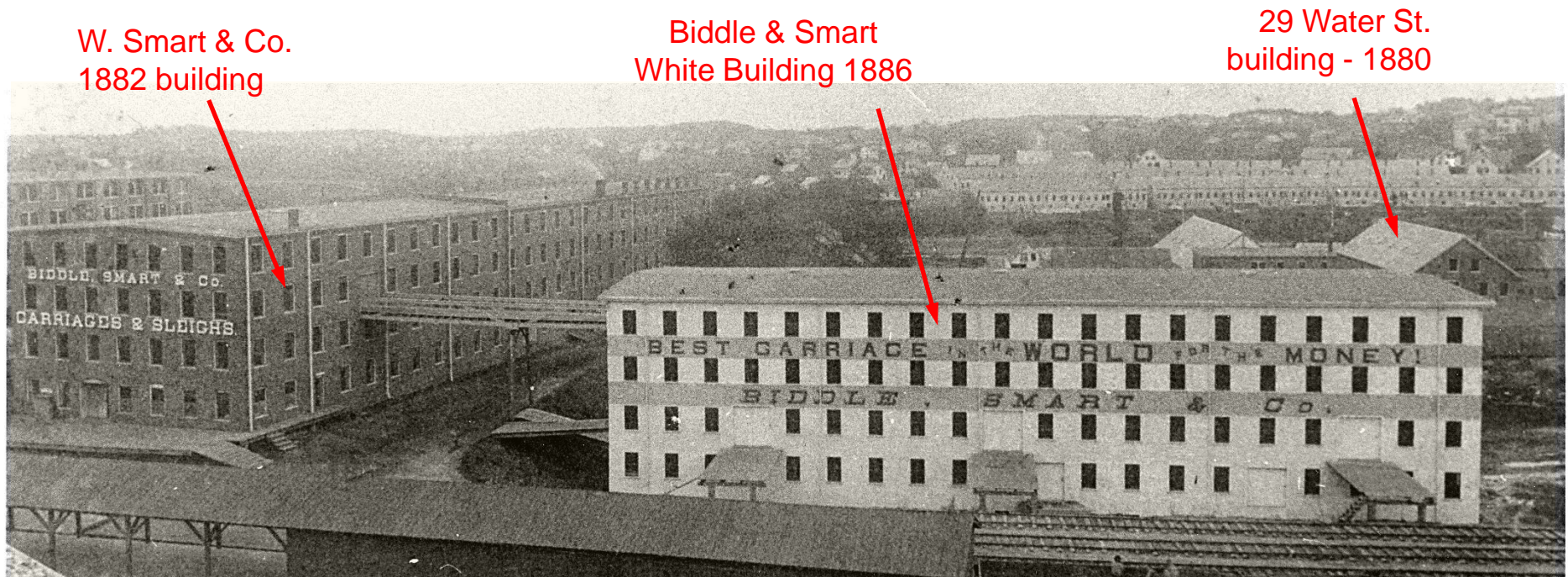
The north side of the railroad, facing Railroad Avenue, may still have required fill and site work, while Water St. was already a busy area having textile mills and Biddle & Smart Carriage Company. Samuel Rowell and Biddle & Smart thus built factories along the south side, up against the rail berm and resting on pilings over Back River. Rowell performed manufacturing in his building while Biddle & Smart used the White Building for storage and shipping of finished carriages. The buildings were cut off from Railroad Ave. by the railroad berm, so were accessible only from Water Street. The above footbridge is in the same location as today's footbridge. The White Building was also accessible by a 2<sup>nd</sup>-story footbridge from the 1882 Biddle & Smart building (next page) and a carriageway descending beside the building.



## Developing the Water Street Area

The 1882 Biddle & Smart. building was located in what is now lower Chestnut Street, establishing the eastern boundary of both the Railroad Ave. & Water St. industrial area and the elevated railroad berm. At that time, Chestnut Street ended at Oakland St. (then named Carriage Avenue), but with a short extension for rolling carriages down to the railroad freight sheds. Because the five-story 1886 Biddle & Smart White Building was pushed up against the raised railroad berm, its loading ramps led from 3<sup>rd</sup> story doors out onto rail cars, seen below.

The B&M absorbed the old Eastern Railroad in 1886. Promising Railroad Avenue development induced the B&M to move the passenger depot in 1887, making space for both the 1887 Folger & Drummond carriage factory and later carriage factories that provided increased rail freight income, freight costs being a notable disadvantage for Amesbury carriage makers shipping throughout the United States.

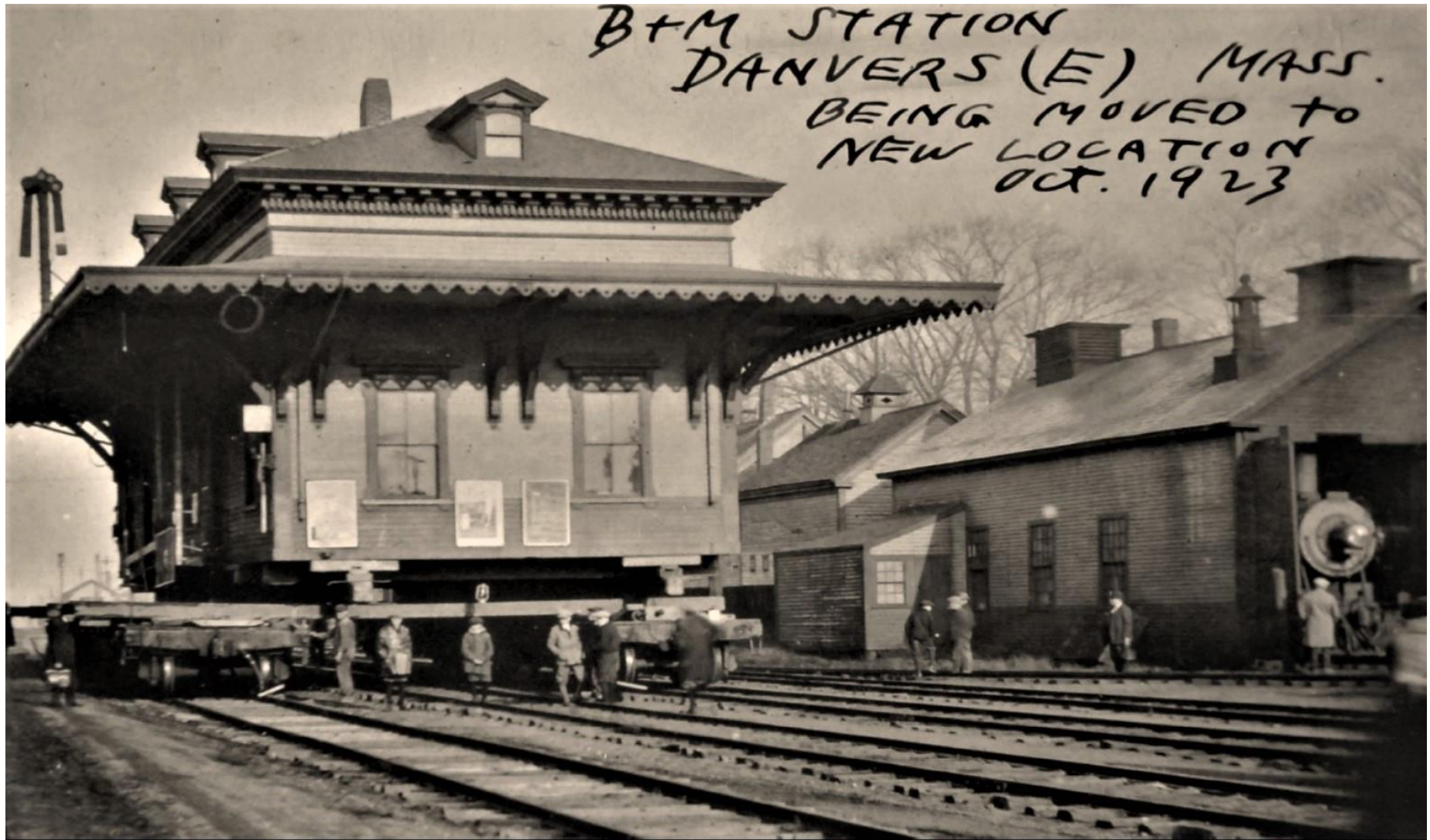


Courtesy of Rick Bartley



# Moving a Similar Passenger Depot, Danvers - 1923

The 1887 Amesbury move would have been a nearly identical exercise



Courtesy of Salisbury Point RR Historical Society

Moving the depot required supporting it with multiple side-by-side flatbed cars on adjacent sets of tracks. After building a new 2-track wood trestle across Back River in 1887, Amesbury rail yards had similar circumstances with the space and means to roll the passenger depot inbound across the Back River trestle to its current Water Street location<sup>1</sup>.

1) *The Amesbury Passenger Railroad Station*,  
Tom Murphy, ACM, March 9, 2018



## Passenger Depot's New Water St. Location – ca. 1890



Courtesy of Salisbury Point RR Historical Society

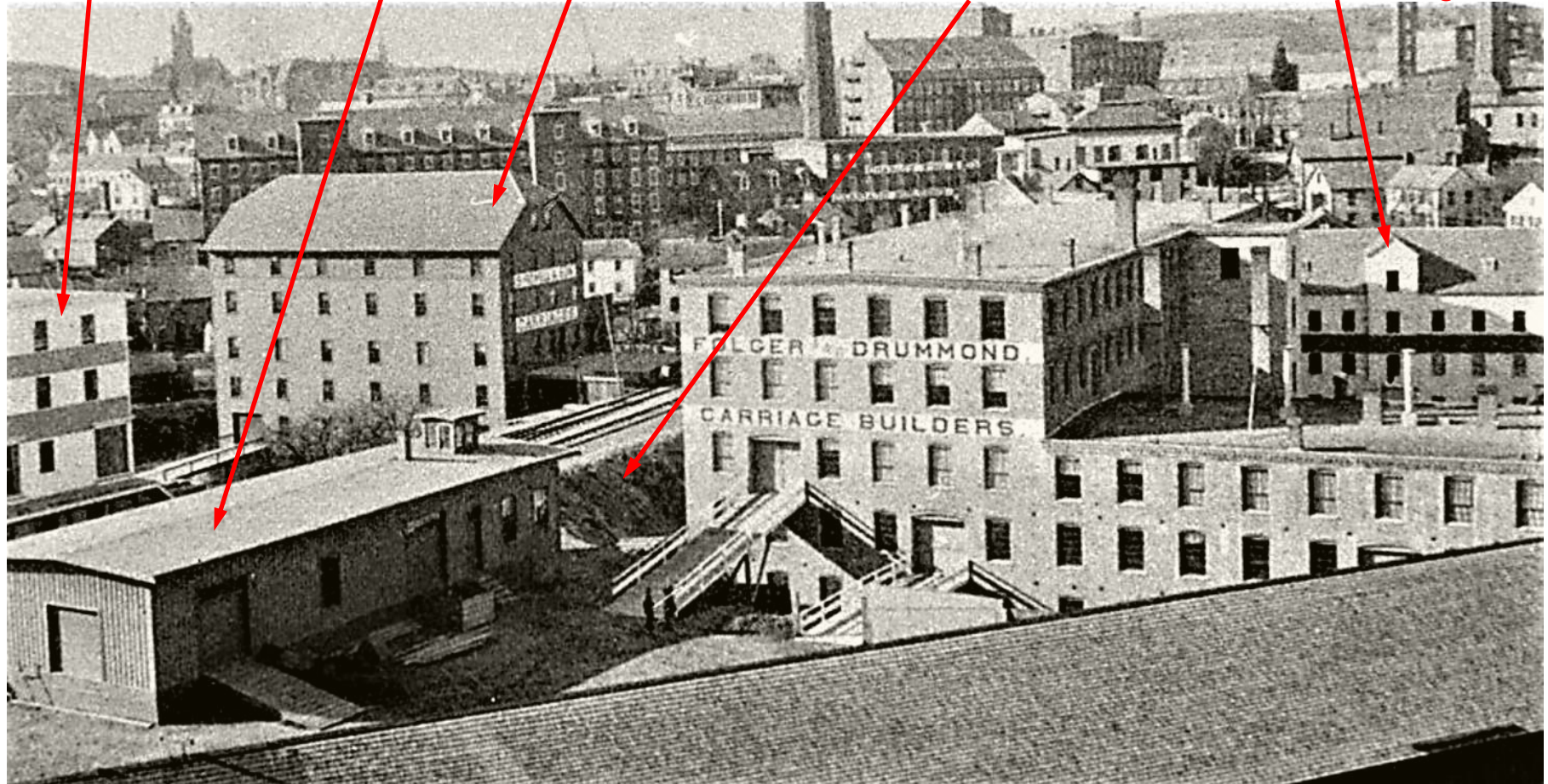
The building at far left is the Union Block commercial building, which had burned in 1884 and was rebuilt as seen here. The building behind the depot at far right, where there is now a small park, was a Chinese laundry at about the time of this photo. The bric-brac trim has been removed from around the overhanging depot roof.



# Inbound View of Folger & Drummond ca. 1890

raised railroad shows between Folger & Drummond and B&M freight shed

N. H. Folger 1888    Freight shed    Samuel Rowell 1886    railroad berm    Charles W. Long 1887



Courtesy of Rick Bartley

The lower left freight shed was at railroad level while the Folger & Drummond factory resided on lower ground, so that their loading ramps were on the third floor of a five-story building; likewise for N. H. Folger loading doors far left. Because of the continuous elevated railroad, buildings on the far side of the railroad were accessed from Water Street via the footbridge between N. H. Folger and the Rowell building, the same location as today's footbridge. Crossing the footbridge from Water Street, one was looking at Folger & Drummond rising over the railbed.



## Outbound View of N. H. Folger Building ca. 1890

loading doors are on 3<sup>rd</sup> floor with two lower stories below railroad grade

These two buildings still exist at Oakland & Chestnut Streets, see next page



Courtesy of Salisbury Point RR Historical Society

The Folger & Drummond building was located behind their white wood fence that fronted the railroad at far left. It is difficult today to become oriented in this picture because so many of the features have not existed for over two generations. The camera here was located at a point of the elevated railroad berm that no longer exists. The photo on the next page was taken just slightly further down the tracks, nearer to the N. H. Folger building on the right.



# Current Outbound View from near N. H. Folger Building

current German AutoSport building is just to the right, down the embankment

The two buildings that still exist at Oakland & Chestnut Streets





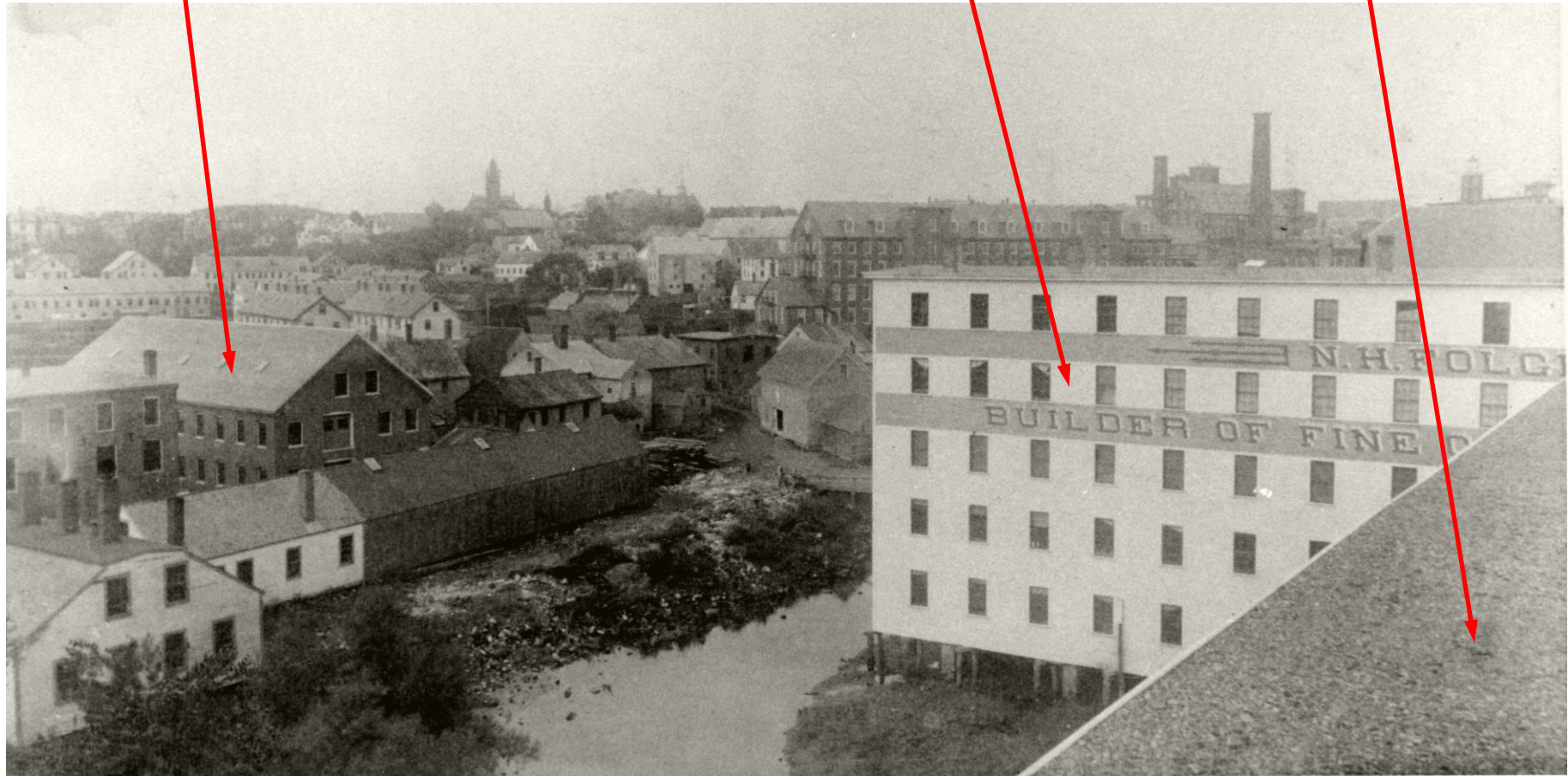
# Looking Inbound at Back of N. H. Folger Building

located where current German AutoSport resides  
except N. H. Folger building extended further out over Back River

29 Water Street,  
still extant today.

N. H. Folger Building

Roof of Biddle & Smart  
White Building



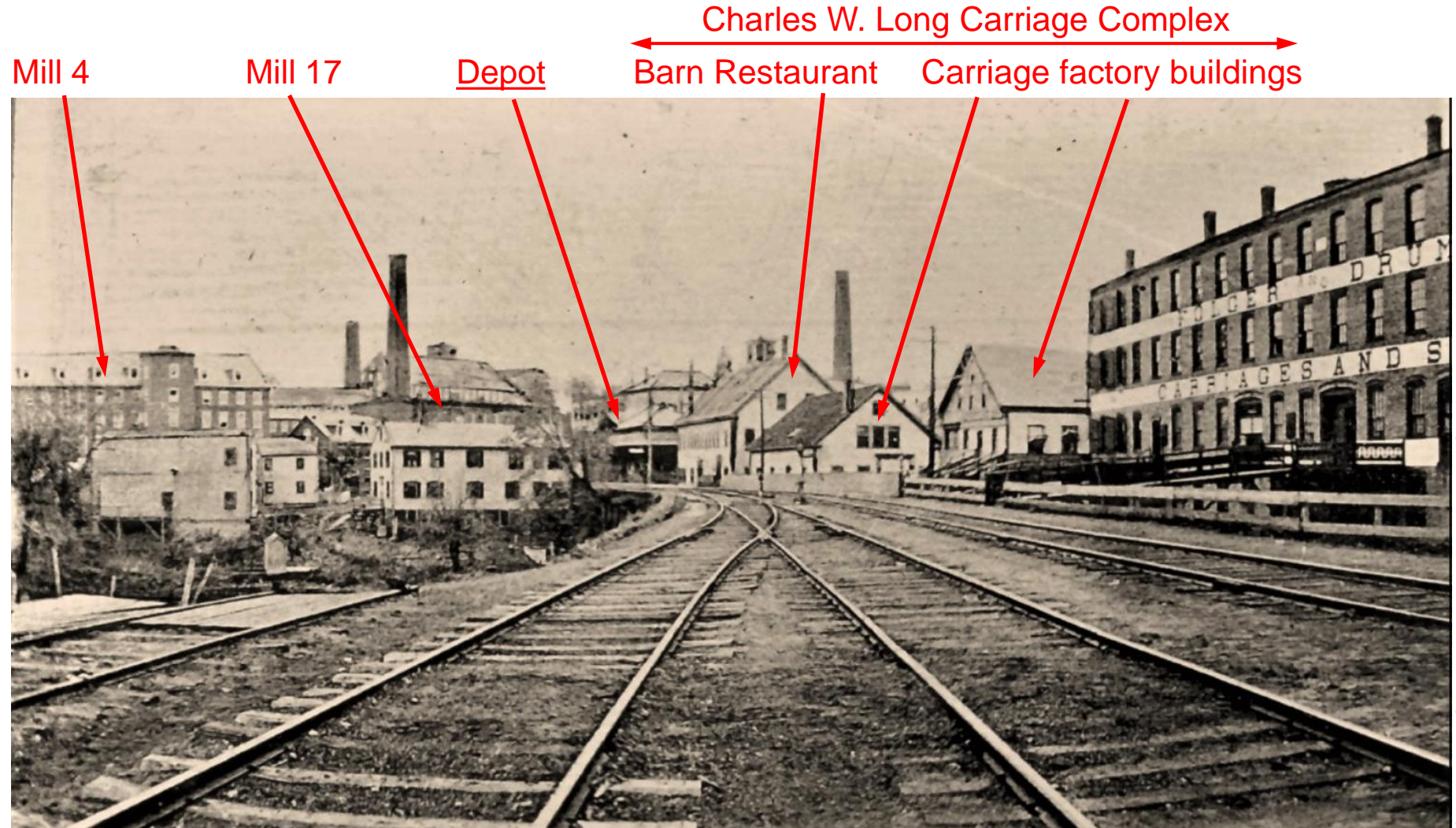
Courtesy of Rick Bartley

Back River is seen here at low tide. Much of the N. H. Folger building extended out over Back River on pilings plus precast concrete footers under posts of its post and beam construction. At least one of the concrete footers is visible today in the riverbank behind German AutoSport.



## Looking Inbound ca. 1905

Folger & Drummond, at right, was in the rear parking lot of today's Senior Center



Courtesy of Salisbury Point RR Historical Society

Folger & Drummond was where the passenger depot previously had been. The N. H. Folger building was directly off the left side where a set of tracks is seen ending. Charles W. Long's carriage complex was on the far side of Back River, except his far-right building was on the near side (accessed by his own bridge) along the river and next to today's Senior Center. Samuel Rowel's 1886 building was across from Folger & Drummond's far end but had burned in 1903.



# Several Other Railroad Ave. Developments

Charles W. Long's  
bridge over Back River

Today's  
Senior Center

Maxfield & Currier  
lumber yards

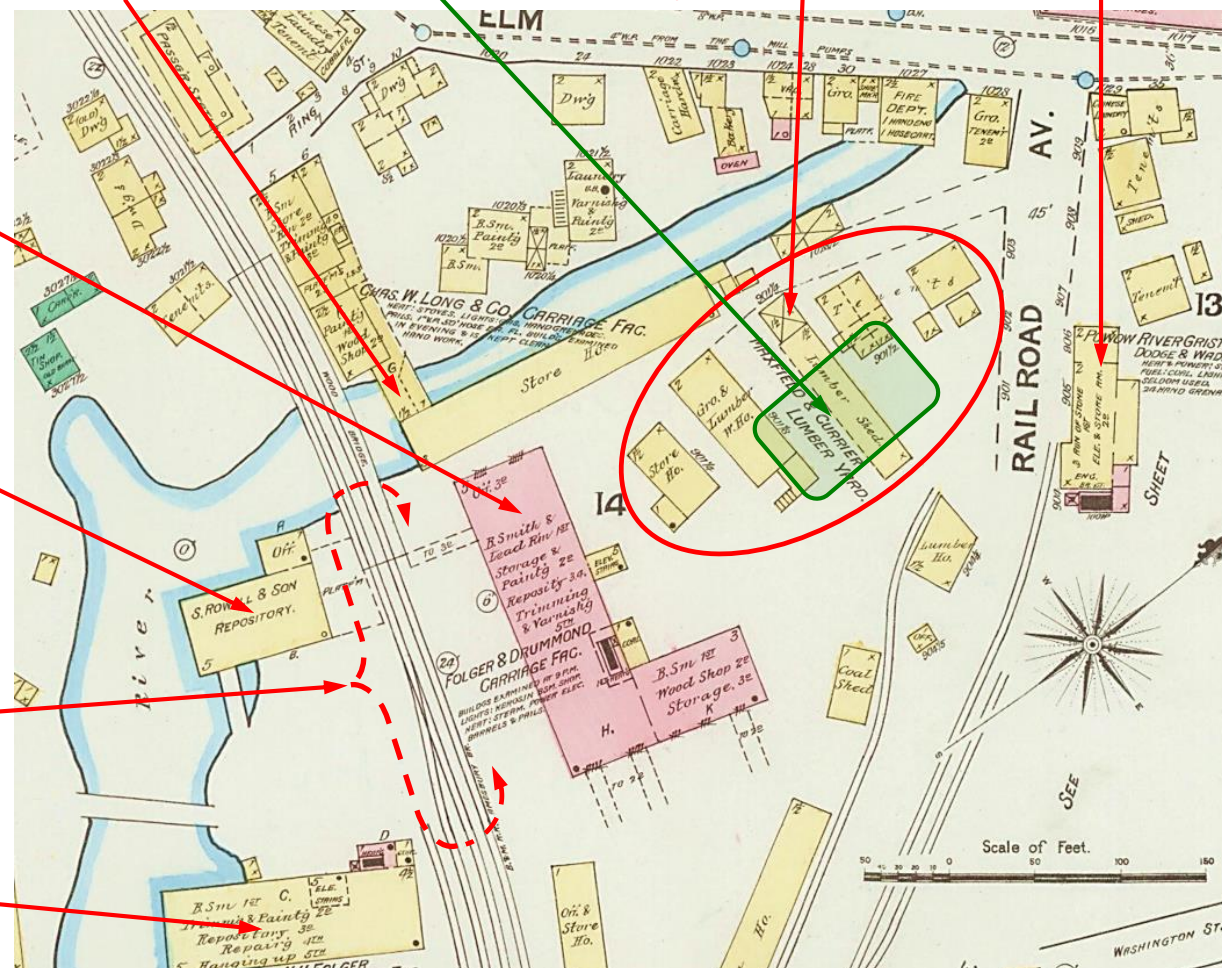
Dodge & Gott,  
Powow River Grist Mill

Folger & Drummond  
carriages, 1887

S. Rowell & Son  
carriages, 1886

Section of rail berm  
now removed

N. H. Folger  
carriages, 1888



Sanborn Map of 1889, Sht. 3

Dodge & Gott (here called Dodge & Wade) was located where today there is a white 3-bay garage for Nichols' scrapyard. Lumber yards dominated the area opposite Dodge & Gott for many years, serving the town and particularly carriage factories. Right below them was the carriage factory of Hagan & Connor from about 1887 until it burned in 1890. In recent times a section of the raised berm was removed to open access through the area of Folger & Drummond (Senior Center back parking lot). Today's Senior Center building is in the area of the previous lumber yards.



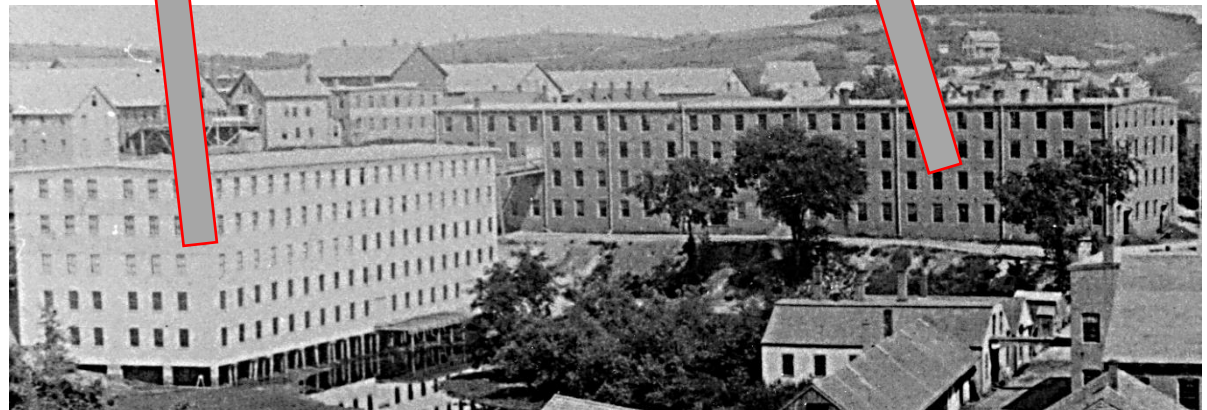
# 4 & 5 Story Water Street Factories Along the Railbed

As they would have been located in 1900

Rowell Building burned 1903    N. H. Folger building burned 1933    Biddle & Smart White Building demolished late 1940s    Biddle & Smart 1882 bldg. demolished ca. 1950



The above indicates three 5-story buildings arranged at ground level in the narrow space between the elevated railroad berm and Back River. They thus rested over the river on pilings. The long 4-story brick building sat directly in today's lower Chestnut Street.



These views show the industrial carriage-making density of the railroad area. There were factories on Carriage Hill, across the tracks on Chestnut and Oakland Streets. Additional factories resided between the two rail spurs, one of the latter along Railroad Avenue and the other curving toward the passenger depot on Water Street. And, there were the above buildings across Back River, but accessible only from Water Street. A hill dropped off beside the long brick building down into Back River, having a carriage-way extending from Water St. down to the far end of the White Building.



# A Cross Section of the Elevated Railroad Berm

Looking from the Senior Center toward German AutoSport

The two buildings that still exist  
at Oakland & Chestnut Streets

Original  
rail bed

German AutoSport  
(N. H. Folger bldg.)



The elevated railroad berm has been cut through and removed in the area of the green hillside. Four sets of tracks would have resided across the top of the hill. Today's German AutoSport comes up against the berm where the N. H. Folger building used to be. Rather than coming straight at us, the berm would be curving noticeably to the right as it approached, turning to cross a wood trestle over Back River that rested atop wood pilings seen on the next page.



# Remnants of the Wood Railroad Trestle

Looking from Senior Center back parking area toward The Barn restaurant

Parking garage

Barn restaurant

6 Trestle  
pilings



At bottom is the sidewalk along Back River, beside the Senior Center. Five feet beyond are the stubs of six pilings in a row that supported the railroad trestle. Another set can be seen down over the bank in Back River. Some Rowell building pilings are visible and two more rows of trestle pilings can be seen in the river at low tide. The trestle aligned with the parking garage right side.



## And Then.....

After the Great Depression regular passenger service ended in 1936, the engine house was dismantled in 1941, and the last freight train ran slowly over decrepit tracks in 1971. The passenger depot was sold to the Farmers Feed & Grain Co. in 1943, used afterward for grain storage<sup>1</sup>. The N. H. Folger building burned in 1933. Many other factories sat empty, becoming un-maintainable town property by tax title action and gradually succumbed to demolition. One of the last survivors (until around 1950) was the 1882 Wm. Smart & Co. building, a 200 foot long, four story brick building that was once New England's largest carriage factory. After the halcyon carriage and auto body days, the Railroad Ave. area is once again relatively empty.

1) 2018 notes provided by Richard Nichols of Salisbury Point RR Historical Society

N. H. Folger building ca. 1890,  
the slope of the railroad berm descending beside it at bottom left



Courtesy of Salisbury Point RR Historical Society