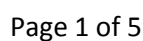


## Lee-Huntington Trolley Line

The Lee to Huntington Trolley Line which became known as the Huckleberry Line during its first season of operation was constructed by the Western Massachusetts Contracting Company for the Berkshire Street Railway (owned by the **New York New Haven and Hartford Railroad**). The nickname, “Huckleberry Line”, came about as a result of the abundant huckleberries available for picking along the line. Built between 1911 and 1913 at an extravagant cost of \$3,000,000 for the track alone without equipment. It operated for only two years; with service suspended in 1919. The track was removed in 1923. The line never made a profit.

In the pre-automobile age, the hilltown farms were in steep decline due to their inability to get goods efficiently to market. Additionally, travel was difficult for the local people; it was hoped the line would improve this situation and also bring tourist to the region. Originally the line was slated to follow Route 20 from Lee to Huntington through Chester, but Blandford residents lobbied for its construction through Blandford. After years of discussion and political debate over where to place the line and how to pay for it, the line was constructed through the hilltowns of Lee, Becket, Blandford, Otis and Huntington.



OpenStreetMap

Edit
History
Export

GPS Traces
User Diaries
Copyright
Help
About

### Way History: Huckleberry Trolley Line (149092239)

Version #2

*Blandford to Lee, MA - Split power line from rail and add power towers (Bing)*

Edited over 7 years ago by OceanVortex · Changeset #19137217

### Tags

name	Huckleberry Trolley Line
railway	abandoned
url	<a href="http://photos.nerail.org/s/?p=113026">http://photos.nerail.org/s/?p=113026</a>

<https://www.openstreetmap.org/way/149092239/history#map=12/42.2544/-73.1210>

The Huckleberry Trolley Line was a blunder of mammoth proportions, ambitiously conceived, laboriously built, and reluctantly operated for just two years. The Huckleberry Line can be seen as a pawn in the great national contests of the day: 1) the governmental anti-trust regulation of corporate and financial giants; 2) the decline of rural areas and the rise of the cities; and 3) the striking transportation revolution wrought by the automobile and tourism. The corporate giant was the New York New Haven and Hartford Railroad, the government was the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the rural area was a forty-mile-square section of Berkshire and Hampden counties. The automotive revolution was highlighted by the State Highway (Rt.20) over **Jacob's Ladder** [[Jacob's Ladder Trail Scenic Highway](#)], the first mountain highway of its kind in the nation.



The Huckleberry Trolley Line track bed is a railroad bed approximately 24 miles long starting on Cape St., in Lee (today at **Lee Premium Outlets**) and Huntington, passing through West Becket. The bed varies in width from approximately 100 to 20 feet. Its general path follows Route 20 east from Lee until 20 intersects Route 8 south in West Becket. A short distance east of the intersection the bed shifts southward to Otis and then east to

Blandford where it descends Cooks Mountain along the Blandford-Huntington Road to Huntington Town Center. A Greek Revival farmhouse, the Houston House, (at the southern end of **Greenwater Pond** by George Carter Rd.; demolished), served as an office/ticket center.

On April 17, 1911, 200 Italian and Polish men broke ground for construction of the “Springfield and Berkshire Street Railway” as it was to be called. Tracks were to be on private right of ways the entire distance. By April 24, the gang of shovelers had begun digging in earnest. Work had started near William Griffith’s sawmill above East Lee near Otis, and was to proceed both ways simultaneously. Ten camps for the workers were built along the line; two men were killed during construction.

When preliminary grading got under way, about 1913 or 1914, it was necessary to bring in a pair of steam “Dinkies”, light-weight standard gauge construction locomotives, utilizing the **Chester and Becket Railroad** [[Chester & Becket Railroad](#)] built in East Becket to serve the granite quarries. A crew brought two locos up to the grade-crossing at “**Turner’s Switch**” where the workers “opened the track” and bent the rails into a temporary turnout to run the engines off onto rail-lengths laid on the gravel town road [Rt. 20]. With one horse on each rail, the crew proceeded to take up the rails behind and spike them



down ahead as the little locos inched along the gravel highway. It took three weeks to reach “**Jacob’s Dream**” (restaurant, at Rt. 20 and Werden Rd.; demolished) in West Becket; after one run-away down Bonny-Rigg hill and a run-in with the state road officials when they blocked the highway on a sharp curve by **Jacob’s Well**. Another Dinky, “Little Eva,” was moved from East Lee in mid-winter, using a great sledge to drag it over the road, with sixty teams of horses to draw the loco to Houston’s at **Greenwater**

**Pond**. The horses were rested every half mile, making the trip in three or four days.

An engine was used to push the construction cars used in building the long fill behind **Greenwater Pond**. Once they lost a car over the end of the fill-they just covered it up!

The new trolley was finished November 29, 1913 when the last spike was driven. It took one thousand men three and one-half years of labor to complete. There would be some settling and repairing of a few fills, but it would be ready for use the next spring. During January 1914, however, the New Haven lost its anti-trust battle in the courts, and was given until July 1919 to divest its trolley and steamship holdings in four states. It was able to hang on tenuously to the Berkshire system for a few years.

The trolley line remained closed for another 18 months and many washouts and slides occurred from the fresh embankments, undermining or burying the rails. November 26, 1915, a party was hurriedly collected in Lee to make a run to the **Tiffany Place** in Blandford; stopping before the blocked Tiffany cut.

The operating schedule and fare (double the cost to Pittsfield) were objectionable. The working people and students were not served. The first car ran five minutes after many workers were required to be at their jobs, and again slightly before they left work for home; costing an estimated 100 fares a day. Likewise, the schedule missed students attending school in Lee by five minutes, the schedule did however work for the East Lee school students. There was no afternoon car for the students-the return car did not run until 6:05 P.M.; costing another estimated 50 fares. The school had to maintain its own team of horses for transportation. By October, 1916 the situation had not improved.

The Public Services Commission issued its decision that the Berkshire Street Railway must complete the construction of its line from the Town of Lee to the Town of Huntington, rendering it safe and suitable for operation, and open the entire line for use on or before July 1, 1917. The first through trip left Pittsfield at 10:05 A.M. on August 15, 1917.



"First Trip Through to Huntington from Lee" Scene showing one of the safety sidings on the grade to Huntington. Car has stopped to turn the switch."

The Berkshire Eagle

The woman appears to be carrying two buckets; probably loaded with huckleberries picked along the tracks. The abundant berries were how the railroad got the name "Huckleberry Line."

At Huntington there was no connection with the Springfield Street Railway's Westfield Division, whose tracks were only a few feet away; that would have made the line attractive to through travelers and freight shippers. The poor schedule, high fares and lack of advertising kept the number of passengers to a minimum. War draftees were the exception, traveling over the mountain to the government induction center in Lee.

In the fall of 1917, the entire operation was suspended for the season. The arrival of the first **World War** took its toll on the railroads. The service was restored in April, 1918, continuing to October, when it was again stopped during the influenza epidemic and unsettled labor conditions. In Spring 1919, the company declined to run the line unless the towns served by the line agreed to make up an estimated \$8,000 operating deficit. The on-line towns could not afford to pay the cost, so the New Haven declared the end of its obligation to the Lee-Huntington Trolley. A post-war, labor strike called against the Berkshire Street Railway, from August to October, 1919 dealt a final crippling blow. The arrival of the automobile was seriously competing with the trolley line.

On October 31, 1919, the Public Services Commission denied the final petition to force the restoration of service. After years of mismanagement and intended neglect, along with a shortage of rails after the war, the New Haven began removing the rails in October, 1920. In May, 1922, 500 feet of charged copper Huckleberry trolley wire was cut down and stolen before the thieves were caught by the Lee and State Police. After the freight contract with the Newell Quarry expired in 1923, the line ceased to operate.

Major Sources for this article: by **Leonard Holmes Spencer**: in his term paper *Chronicle On The Huckleberry The Lee-Huntington Trolley Line*, Williams College May, 1967 and his article "The Chester and Becket Railroad" in A Bicentennial History of Becket Berkshire County, Massachusetts 1765-1965

Today the **Massachusetts Turnpike** travels over the old trolley line in two places. The first crossing is near the junction of Routes 20 and 8; the trolley bed and the power line separate east of North Blandford. The ROW crosses the Pike the second time in the vicinity of the Blandford rest area on the westbound side of the highway.

In other areas the **Eversource** electric utility owns the right of way, obliterating the trolley line. Hikers can still follow parts of the line; the following sources provide hiking information:

<https://westernmasshilltownhikers.com/2020/02/25/huckleberry-trolley-line/>

<http://masstrails.com/becket.html>

For further information email the Becket Historical Commission:

[historical@townofbecket.org](mailto:historical@townofbecket.org)