

Wachusett Reservoir Watershed

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION
DIVISION OF WATER SUPPLY PROTECTION



Rivers

The confluence of the Stillwater River and Quinapoxet River joining the South branch of the Nashua River attracted industry to what became known as the Oakdale area. The abundance of available water power resulted in flourishing industrial growth.

Railroads

Oakdale grew to be a major junction for two rail lines and a depot station to move manufactured goods.

The Worcester, Nashua & Portland Division of the Boston & Maine Railroad line provided a direct north/south connection. The Central Massachusetts Railroad provided an east/west connection.

Reservoir

During this era of industry and progress, the glacial Nashua River Valley became the optimal location to provide clean drinking water for the growing Boston population.

The acts of 1896 were the first time the state would flood an inhabited area to create a drinking water supply. Sections of Boylston, West Boylston, Clinton and Sterling were evacuated and the structures below the shoreline were removed.

Upon completion, the Wachusett Reservoir was the largest public water supply reservoir in the world and the largest body of water in the state.

This quick halt in industry in the Oakdale area resulted in environmental enhancements as the manufacturing waste was cleaned from the rivers and the natural flow was restored, providing pristine waters and protected watershed land.

"On the watershed above Oakdale, 5 cases of pollution from factory wastes have been corrected." Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board Annual Report, 1902

Remnants of the Past

Consider the wind whispering in the trees a resonating reminder of the bustling mill workings of long ago.

Traces and ruins of mills remain along the path. These reminders of the mills that once harnessed the power of the rivers that now feed the reservoir hint to the ambition of an era.

The peak of industry in the village of Oakdale gave way to the Wachusett Reservoir, but gained protection of the surrounding valuable natural resources for future generations.



(Above) Nov 10, 1896. West Boylston Manufacturing Company from the Central Massachusetts Railroad tracks near bridge, Oakdale. The black stripe on the left telegraph pole indicates the future high water mark of Wachusett Reservoir. Everything below was removed or relocated.



(Above) March 12, 1902. Removing Oakdale Mill Pond dam. Considerable work was done tearing down and cleaning up around the mills.



(Right) May 8, 1902. Soil-stripping railway under Boston & Maine Railroad tracks, Oakdale.

Sept. 29, 1905. Oakdale Quinapoxet River Channel. The river channels were widened and excavated. The hard soil and large boulders that were removed were used as embankments, berms along the Central Massachusetts Railroad above Oakdale, and for surfacing new roads.



May 8, 1903. Stripping soil below Oakdale on section 10.

St. Anthony's Catholic Church steeple in the background points out the location of the neighboring Old Stone Baptist Church.

