

Removing the Grade Crossings

More than 75 years ago Alexander Gmelin took several hundred photographs of the demolition and construction involved in the elimination of the Central Railroad of New Jersey's grade crossing in Cranford.

In 1986, Alexander's brother, the late Stephan Gmelin, a long-time Trustee and President of the Cranford Historical Society, put 80 of these photos, with descriptive captions, into a book entitled "The Grade Crossing Elimination at Cranford, 1928-1931."

The following text, written by Stephan Gmelin, is taken from the preface and introduction of this book. Remember, this was written in 1986. The photos are from the Alexander Gmelin collection.

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During most of the period of removing the grade crossings and building the new station in Cranford, my brother took pictures of the work, using a Graflex camera and cut film, and processing most of it in his dark room. When I inherited this collection of some four hundred negatives, I felt that the logical place for them to be was with the Cranford Historical Society, but I decided that rather than just leaving the photographs alone, I would select a number of them and add clarifying notes to enhance their interest and value. This book is the result.

In choosing the pictures to use, preference was given to any showing a landmark so as to identify the scene for to-day's viewers, as well as groups of photographs from the same location to show the progress of the work...



Baltimore & Ohio's METROPOLITAN SPECIAL, the night train from Washington, approaching Cranford. (1926)

After more than fifty-five years, it is difficult to realize what a marked improvement in the appearance of Cranford the elimination of the grade crossing made. The intersection of Walnut Avenue with Union Avenue directly in the center of the tracks created an extremely hazardous situation, aggravated by the frequent movement of high-speed trains which necessitated the prompt clearance of vehicles from the crossing. The volume of rail traffic was far greater than to-day, with more than fifty New Jersey Central trains each way every day, besides the regular hourly trains to

and from Philadelphia, eight Baltimore & Ohio trains each way, and a large number of freight trains from the coal regions of Pennsylvania and the South. With the station located immediately to the east of the crossing, there were numerous fatalities over the years of pedestrians running across the tracks from the north side to catch trains.



The BULLET, New Jersey Central's fast Scranton train, approaching Cranford. (1931)

The entire project, embracing the removal of two grade crossings, building two new high-level platforms with waiting room and ticket office at street level, a new road underpass at Centennial Ave., and a new bridge across the Rahway River, was of more than ordinary dimensions, requiring an intricate plan of logistics to allow no interruption in road traffic and use of station facilities to take place. Basically, the raising of the track grade was accomplished in steps involving two tracks at a time, first to the south side of the right of way and then progressively back to the north side until completed.

