

## **Cecilwood Vest Pocket Railway**

**by Anthony Musso**

In 1916, **W. Cecil Gage**, a New York City insurance broker, decided to retire and relocate to an estate in Fishkill, Dutchess County. Looking forward to a life of leisure, within seven years Gage was busier than ever, working on a new enterprise he built on his property.

Having a sizable piece of land on the north side of today's Main Street (Route 52) in an area now occupied by the Cecilwood Plaza in the middle of the Village of Fishkill, Gage, despite having no experience working with tools and also never having a hobby, created the Cecilwood Vest Pocket Railroad. It included two (2) miles of track, and aside from purchasing strap-iron reinforcements that he used to line the wooden rails, Gage built the locomotive, train cars, rails, ties, switches and even a trestle from discarded lumber and materials found on the property.

“The Gage house sat right along Main Street and he laid out the railroad on the fields behind it,” Village of Fishkill Historian Allan Way said. “He owned a lot of land back there; part of it is a residential complex today.”

Gage's motivation to build the railroad began during his first winter in Fishkill, when to dispose of ashes from his residence's furnace, he had to carry it about a quarter mile to dump. As a solution, he built a small train car that resembled a railroad flat car to transport the ashes. Because the uneven ground on his property was tough to navigate, he then conceived the idea of moving the car along rails.

He used two-by-four lumber that he salvaged from the frame of a hen house and mounted on beams taken from the same structure. The following winter proved more manageable, as Gage pushed his car along the tracks with a pole. Reveling in his success, that spring he added another quarter mile of track and built a second car. They served to transport freight, farm products and fuel to different parts of the estate. Gage became stimulated to extend the rails farther; so far, that a locomotive soon became necessary to pull the load.

He purchased an eight-horsepower, gasoline engine for the locomotive and the process of upgrading and extending the tracks became a much enjoyable pastime for him. When completed, the railroad included a 2-mile loop of track, five passenger cars, two flat cars, a freight car, eight switches, four crossings — each equipped with warning signs — a turntable, snow plow, ticket office and six stations that he built and placed along the route.

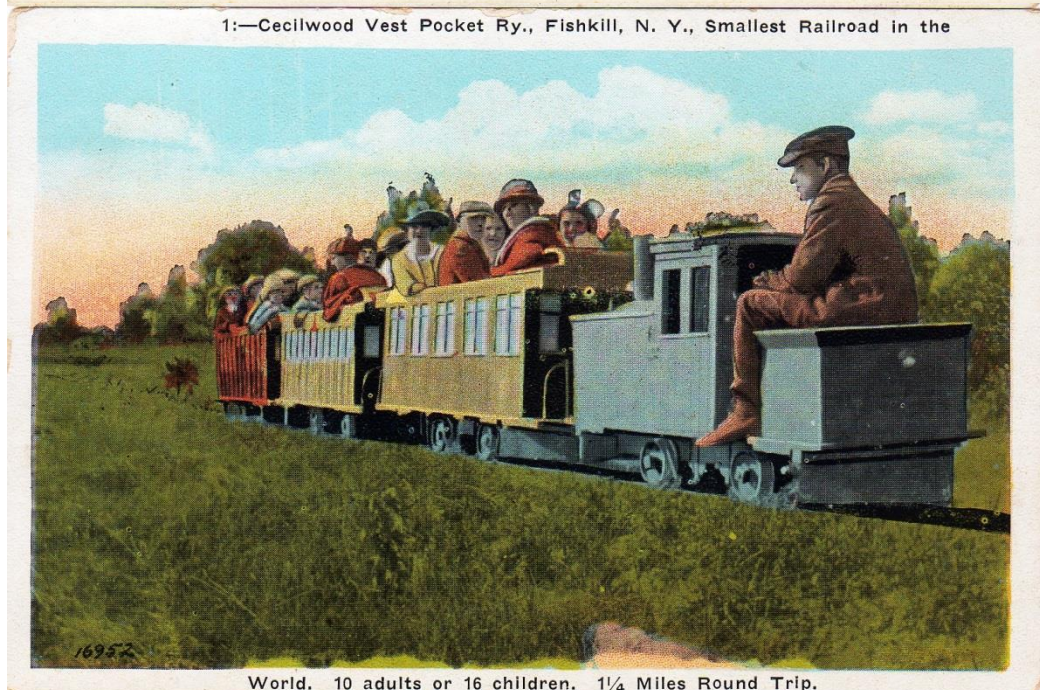
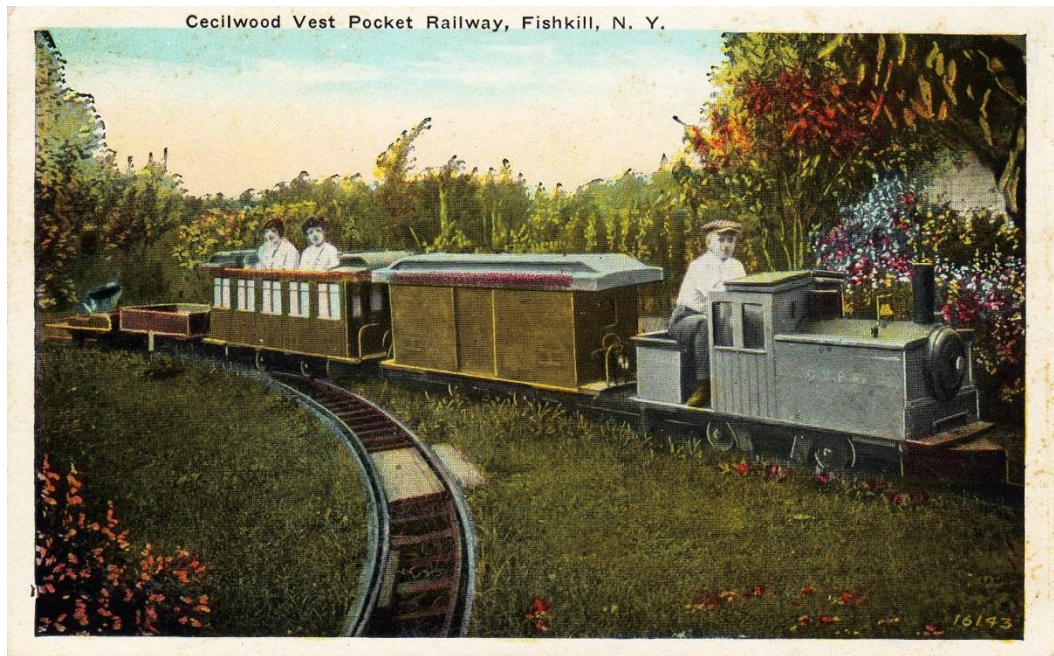
A former chicken house was used to store the train at night and during periods of severe weather. The passenger cars, each of which was 5-feet long, included elliptical springs under the seats to ensure maximum comfort for those riding in cars along the 14-inch gauge line.

While people aware of the railroad clamored to ride it, Gage initially only granted rides to family and friends. That changed when a church picnic was held at the Gage estate and the railroad took on a more public use. As word started to spread about the amazing miniature railroad, requests to

ride it came from near and far; soon after, Gage decided to charge a fee to ride his train and he opened it to the public.

Gage was the ticket agent, engineer, conductor, traffic manager and repair crew. His planned life of leisure in Fishkill never came to fruition; however, he got a great sense of enjoyment from operating his miniature railroad.

While locals enjoyed riding the train, many others traveled a considerable distance to do so.



World. 10 adults or 16 children. 1/4 Miles Round Trip.