

# Establishment Of The Glen Cove Telegraph Line (1872)

by Daniel E Russell  
City Historian  
City of Glen Cove, New York

The 19th century saw radical changes in the modes and speed of communication between Glen Cove and New York City. By the 1830's, the slow post rider and coastal sailing vessels had been largely replaced by fast, sleek steamboats as the principal carrier of written and printed communications between New York City and Glen Cove. In 1867, a branch of the Long Island Railroad had been opened to Glen Cove; although the railroad and steamboat lines transported information at comparable speeds, the railroad was slightly less subject to delays by winter weather, while the steamboat line was not infrequently barred from entering harbors by ice for days — even weeks — at a time.

Upon the completion of the Glen Cove Branch of the L.I.R.R., the local newspaper, the Glen Cove Gazette, began to agitate for the creation of a telegraph link between Glen Cove and New York City, making communication possible not in a matter of hours, but seconds. A committee was formed to raise the necessary capital, and the Gazette ran the following notice on May 18, 1867:

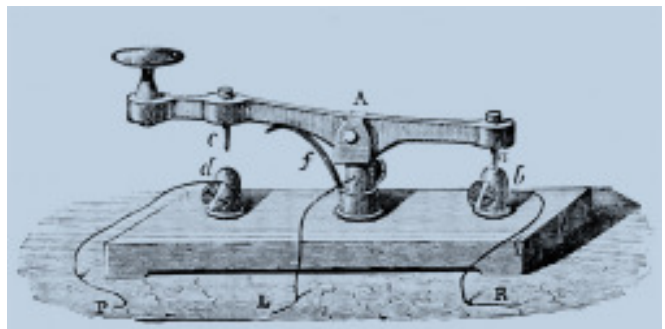
The subscriptions to the telegraph should be hurried up. It will be a very great convenience to our business men and a decided acquisition that sojourners and others will appreciate. The offer on the part of the Railroad Company, to give one half the cost and furnish the operator, we esteem a very liberal one. James B. Pearsall will receive the subscriptions. We have got a railroad at last — a trifling amount raised among ourselves will give us a telegraph, too. (GC Gazette, 1867)

For unspecified reasons, this initial proposal for the creation of a telegraph link was not fully acted upon, and no further notice on the matter appeared in the Gazette that year.

In early 1868, the issue of a new telegraph line was raised

again, and a public meeting was held to hear the proposals of Mr. Richard Brown, representing the Long Island Telegraph Company. The Long Island Telegraph Company offered to erect the necessary lines for \$800 by public subscription in the form of an offering of stock in the new service at \$10 per share, or, alternately, issuing scrip for the amount subscribed for the telegraph which could subsequently be redeemed in an equivalent value of free message units. The Gazette added that, by adopting the Long Island Telegraph Company proposal, Glen Cove would be brought “within hailing distance of Jamaica, Hempstead, Roslyn, Rockville Center, Freeport, Amityville, Babylon, Islip, Fire Island, Northport, Huntington, Cold Spring, and Oyster Bay ... in fact all the principal places on the Island.” The Long Island Telegraph Company was further proposing to construct offices at Brooklyn, which would permit the interconnection of their system with that of Western Union Telegraph (GC Gazette, 1868a)

By mid-April of that year, the Gazette reported that the agreement with the Long Island Telegraph Company had been “signed, sealed and delivered”, and that \$500 of the total needed to fill the subscription for the line had already been raised (albeit, by the report of the Gazette, that the amount was pledged by “some eight to ten gentlemen, who cannot be expected to



increase the amount another farthing...”) (GC Gazette, 1868b) In May, as Glen Cove prepared to celebrate the 200th anniversary of its founding, the Gazette continued to agitate for subscriptions to the fund, pointing out that the telegraph service would be an “almost indispensable service to the business portion of the community” as well as “highly appreciated by our summer sojourners” (GC Gazette, 1868c). The editor noted that \$150 still remained to be subscribed for the telegraph (GC Gazette, 1868d), adding that

“The telegraph is accounted one of the most useful inventions of the age, and a very great convenience in any community of sufficient importance to maintain a station — There is hardly a place on the Island where the people stand in greater need of a telegraph than Glen Cove. Of the hundreds who seek the country every season, nearly all are active business men who esteem telegraphic facilities as one of the chief inducements of a summer sojourn, and there can be no manner of doubt but that our boarding house keepers will find it to add largely to their profits. It will save the merchant, the manufacturer, the business man and farmer a great deal of time, and ‘time is money in this hurly burly age. It is one of the helps that gives the real estate of a section an enhanced value, and for this if for no other reason, Glen Cove ought to have it.” (GC Gazette, 1868d)

In February, 1869, the Gazette stated that “the Telegraph project died of delay... three months were consumed in getting subscriptions, and even then fell short of the amount required..” (GC Gazette, 1869a), and while “prominent residents” suggested another public meeting, little was accomplished to advance the project (GC Gazette, 1869b).

It was not until March, 1870 that further news of the telegraph appeared in the Gazette. Announcing a public meeting on the matter, to be held on March 30th, 1870, at 7:30 PM at Glen Hall, the newspaper stated that “this is the fifth year of the agitation or talk about a telegraph”, adding:

“It has been talked about long enough and it is time for action. Every body seems to be in favor, no one is opposed to it, and it only remains for our capitalists to subscribe the amount required. We understand it costs about \$100 per mile to build a telegraph on the Island, and a line to Glen Cove will cost from \$1000 to \$3000 according to where the connection is formed.” (GC Gazette, 1870a)

At the March 30th meeting, Townsend D. Cox was appointed Chairman, and a committee of Wright Duryea, C.B.Gruman, and Townsend D. Cox named to “investigate the matter and report such facts as they can gather” at the next meeting (GC Gazette, 1870b). In the interim, the Gazette reported:

“The probabilities are that the entire cost will not exceed \$2,500, a very small amount for so wealthy a community like this to raise. There is about

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\$700,000 taxable property in the School District, which honestly interpreted means that our tax payers are worth not far from \$10,000,000, and infinitesimal per centage on this amount would build half a dozen lines of telegraph such as is contemplated... Whatever is done let it be done promptly! not dawdled along by picayune subscriptions that make day-laborers blush for their wealthy brothers. We once had parties offer to construct a telegraph line to this village for \$800, but the young man who undertook to get the amount subscribed failed to reach the figure named after a long period of persistent canvassing and the parties who made the offer sickened and died of old age.” (GC Gazette, 1870c)

Another public meeting was called for April 13th, 1870. The editor of the Gazette attended the meeting, and reported in full in the next issue of the newspaper:

“The third Telegraph Meeting came off at Glen Hall on Wednesday evening last. Promptly at the hour named Mr. J. K. Milnor, Esq., and the editor of the Gazette were in the room, sole occupants. They lit their pipes and had a comfortable smoke. Ten minutes later the public spirited ticket agent of the Branch Railroad appeared and took a seat. Seven minutes after the last event J.M. Weeks and Elbert Thorne, Esqs., came in and remained standing. The first two having smoked their smoke were about adjourning when, at half past 8, James Titus and Ellwood Valentine, Esqs., came in and took seats. They were followed in a few moments by R.M.Bowne and James Willets, Esqs. Twenty-five minutes to nine Wright Duryea, Esq., came in and proposed the meeting be organized. Just before this was accomplished two persons came and looked in the door, giggled, and immediately left. Mr. Thorne also retired, after which a Chairman and Secretary were chosen, and Mr. Duryea, of the committee, was proceeding with his report, when C.B.Gruman, Esq., came in and took the highest seat in the sinagogue [sic] from which an unobstructed view of the opposite wall and intervening empty chairs and benches could be seen to the fullest and most significant advantage. Mr. Duryea, though evidently disgusted

with the third proof of the utter cussedness of the community in the matter of attending public meetings, made a length, able and most interesting report, embracing the details of connection, number of wires, cost of construction, his interview with the General Supt. of the W.U.T.Co, the telegraph line builders, etc. The various instruments used, exhibited by Mr. D., embraced the latest improvements now known in this wonderful art, and were objects of great interest to those who were present. At the conclusion of the report, Mr. Bowne, the Secretary was called away. It was concluded to invite the General Superintendent of the W.U.T. Company to visit Glen Cove. Mr. Gruman moved an adjournment for two week — but before the resolution could be got into a satisfactory shape left the meeting.... The smokers present lit their pipes and segars, and after an interesting chat the meeting was adjourned.” (GC Gazette, 1870d)

No further reports of progress on the attempt to raise public capital for the construction of the telegraph line appeared in the 1870 and 1871 issues of the Glen Cove Gazette.

On January 12th, 1872, the Gazette reported “a new tele-

graph enterprise, connecting Glen Cove with New York, via Hempstead and Bushwick”, which had been discussed at a public meeting at Glen Hall on January 10th. The Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Company proposed to raise the poles and string steel wire for \$3,600, and to have the line in operation within thirty days of the start of work. A committee consisting of J.B.Pearsall, Wright Duryea, Samuel Cox, James Titus and C.B.Gruman was appointed to examine the proposal further and report back to the next meeting. The Gazette added “now that the matter is again before the public, we hope it will be kept alive...” (GC Gazette, 1872a)

Within a week, rumors were traveling through the community that Western Union had renewed their plans, independently, to run a telegraph line into Glen Cove (GC Gazette, 1872b), as part of a proposed line from Flushing to Huntington, via Manhasset, Roslyn, Glen Cove and Oyster Bay. (GC Gazette 1872c) By early March this rumor was proven to be true (GC Gazette, 1872d), and the March 16, 1872 issue of the Gazette reported that Western Union’s “constructor-in-chief” had already chosen the precise route the telegraph line would take from Roslyn to Huntington, via Glen Cove (with a “loop” to the Glen Cove Landing to provide service to the hotels and other establishments catering to the tourists – an especially valu-

## Victorian Fiction: A Telegraphic Romance

Look around long enough, and you can find the oddest tie-ins with Glen Cove history imaginable...

In 1876, a publication called “Lightning Flashes and Electric Dashes” (“a volume of choice telegraphic literature, humor, fun, wit & wisdom” published for members of the telegraph industry) published a short story of a newly-kindled romance between two people headed for the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. One, a young man named Sydney Summerville was employed in the main office of the Western Union Telegraph Co. in New York City. The other was a young lady from Glen Cove named Eva Marshall, being chaperoned (as all good young Victorian women were) by her parents. Characterized by “a full rounded physique, perhaps about five feet five inches in height. A profusion of golden hair hung in studied carelessness over her shapely shoulders. Her large hazel eyes had a peculiarly hearty, merry twinkle. She was faultless in form and feature, with a complexion where the blended rose and lily seemed to vie for ascendancy.”

Young Sydney and Eva’s eyes meet - but her mother, disapproving of social contact with young men to whom they have not properly introduced, places herself ‘twixt the young couple. Sharing furtive glances, Sydney is surprised when Eva begins tapping out in “tolerably fair” Morse code using the window latch on the train that his “bright smile haunts me still.” The young lady was also a telegraph operator! Sydney, ever the romantic, types back by tapping his pencil “Oh, I see you are an operator.”

Now it was the lady’s turn to be surprised. Had the train been run into and telescoped, the passengers tossed fifty feet in the air, and half their number killed, she could not have been more so. In fact, she had half expected that all along, but to meet a real live telegrapher, one who could read what she clicked off the little window fastener, and answer her in the same “language,” was more than her most vivid imagination could have fancied. It was several moments before she recovered sufficiently to click back: “Yes, or perhaps you would say a plug.”

After the Philadelphia fair is over, and all have returned to their hum-drum lives in New York, young Sydney uses his connections at Western Union’s New York office to track down the lovely Miss Marshall in Glen Cove. He learns from the operator that mans the Glen Cove desk that

Miss Marshall... was not a regular operator, but had merely taken a fancy to telegraphy, and often came to the office to practice. Her father was well off in the world’s goods, being the proprietor of an extensive manufactory, and she never expected, to be under the necessity of earning her own living, either by wafting lightning or otherwise, but the mysterious art interested her, and so she learned it.

(While this may seem far-fetched, in reality quite a few young ladies learned telegraphy, which was then the world’s cutting-edge technology, with no plans to take up a career as an operator. Telegraph classes were even offered in Glen Cove.)

After a few polite Victorian plot complications, the young couple is finally to be united. The author ends the tale with:

I am looking every week for the announcement of their marriage in the telegraphic papers—regretfully, too, for I know that immediately after that event the fraternity will lose an expert operator and genial gentleman, as Mr. Marshall is to be succeeded in the active supervision of his manufactory by his son-in-law, Mr. Sydney Summerville.

Barbara Cartland, eat your heart out!

from: The Centennial Romance

by William John Johnston

in: Lightning flashes and electric dashes: a volume of choice telegraphic literature, humor, fun, wit & wisdom New York, 1877 (William John Johnson, publisher)

## **A New Telegraph Line.**

**The people of Glen Cove, Long Island, have long needed and desired telegraphic communication with this city, and the telegraph system of the country. Lately Messrs. Cox, Titus, and other enterprising citizens, took the matter in hand, and have succeeded in making arrangements for the construction of a line, which is now being built from Glen Cove to Brooklyn, where it will connect with the Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Company. This will afford accommodation to the citizens of and summer visitors at Glen Cove, Oyster Bay and other places, which will, no doubt, be fully appreciated and liberally patronized.**

— **The Telegrapher**  
**6 April 1872**

able feature for summer guests staying at the main hotels in Glen Cove) and planned to have the telegraph line operation within ten days as soon as the “frost is out of the ground” (GC Gazette 1872e)

Before the month was over, both companies were ready to start work on their respective telegraph lines. The Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Company had already begun to erect their poles; the wire and insulators for the Western Union Telegraph line had arrived, and were ready to be installed. The Western Union constructor in chief announced that their telegraph poles, each thirty-five feet tall, would have their bark stripped off, and painted, “thereby rendering them slightly and in no matter objectionable”. In the process of raising their telegraph poles, one of the Atlantic and Pacific field crews chose to locate a pole four inches in front of the gate of a prominent supporter of the Western Union telegraph line in Glen Cove, “thus effectually blocking up the only entrance for wagons to four tenant houses”. “We like to see a spirited rivalry,” wrote the editor, “...but gouging, trespassing on other’s rights, intended insults, is simply meanness of the lowest type. Lest us have peace.” (GC Gazette, 1872f)

On Saturday morning, April 13th, the Western Union crew was finally stretching wire from pole to pole in Glen Cove village. The company had already set up office beneath Continental Hall (on present-day Continental Place) and was installing all of the prerequisite equipment to begin receiving messages. The first telegraph operator was a Miss Moore, described as “an expert operator, a young lady of long practice, noted for accuracy, promptness, and for keeping the affairs of the office inviolate” (GC Gazette, 1872g)

At 6 PM on Thursday, April 18th, 1872, the first telegraph message to Glen Cove was carried over the Western Union lines. Although it was recorded that this message was addressed to Wright Duryea and J.B.Pearsall as leaders of the local telegraph committee, no transcript of the original text appears to have survived. The editor of the Gazette proudly proclaimed “This marks a new era in the history of Glen Cove” (GC Gazette 1872g)

At 10:30am on the first full day of operation, John C Hinchman, Western Union’s New York district manager and general superintendent (Reid, 1886), sent a short congratulatory telegram to the people of Glen Cove:

To Messrs. Duryea and Pearsall:

I congratulate you and the citizens of Glen Cove now that you are in telegraphic communication with the great cities of the world.

— J.C. Hinchman

Just two minutes after the previous message was received, a telegraph arrived which proved the value of the telegraph to local businessmen:

House of Richard Smith, Hempstead, burned. Glen Cove Insurance Co., loose \$3,000. (GC Gazette, 1872g)

Thirty-one minutes to Great Neck from Sea Cliff Grove is quick time for the Seawanhaka.

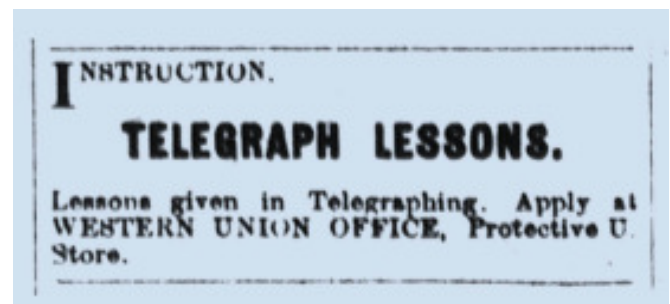
Roslyn, L.I. Apl 19, 1872

To Messrs Duryea and Pearsall:

Messrs Hicks, Terry, Committee and the citizens of Roslyn send greetings to the citizens of Glen Cove and hope that the connection now made will cement the good feelings heretofore existing between these two cities of Long Island.”

The June 1st edition of the magazine The Telegrapher announced the opening of the new line:

A new telegraph line has just been completed on the north shore of Long Island, extending from Glen Cove, Long Island, to Brooklyn and New York city, where it connects with the Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Company. This line is owned and operated by



By January 1874, the Western Union office at the Glen Cove Protective Union Store was offering telegraph lessons to the residents of Glen Cove.



the North Shore Telegraph Company of Long Island, and was opened for business on Friday of last week.

This portion of Long Island has long been in need of telegraphic facilities, and some of the more public spirited citizens, a few months since, inaugurated a movement for securing the construction of a line which has resulted as above stated. This line has been built in the most thorough and substantial manner, and will be vigorously and effectively maintained by the people. Additional offices will be opened at the Pavilion Hotel, at the steamboat landing at Glen Cove, and at the new Methodist camp ground, which is now an assured brilliant success. Other offices will also be opened from time to time upon the line and the extensions to be made to it during the season.

The people of Glen Cove and vicinity are highly elated at the completion of this line, against the opposition and efforts of one or two prominent but unpopular citizens of that village.

After arrangements had been made for the construction of this line, the Western Union Company, under the inspiration of the parties referred to above, proceeded to build a line to Glen Cove for their accommodation—so that now that locality is favored with too lines of telegraph, but one of which is needed or will receive public patronage. (Telegrapher, 1872b)

The Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Company had lost the race. They were still stringing telegraph lines in early May, long after the Western Union had begun its operations in Glen Cove. (GC Gazette, 1872i) The Western Union Company's Glen Cove office was already boasting of a net receipt each day of \$3.00. Their rates were 25¢ for the first ten words, and 2¢ for each additional word. Western Union officials announced that messages received at their Glen Cove offices would be delivered free of charge throughout the community, "within reasonable distance" Arrangements were also made so that local residents sending outgoing messages could give them to the driver of the "Continental Store" wagon, and the messages would "receive prompt attention and dispatch" (GC Gazette 1872g).

By late June or early July, the extensions of the Glen Cove telegraph line to the Glen Cove steamboat landing (headquartered in the Pavilion Hotel) and to the Sea Cliff Grove Association (the Methodist camp meeting grounds which had only recently been incorporated and would evolve into the Village of Sea Cliff).

An office has been opened on the line of the North Shore Telegraph Company of Long Island, on the Sea Cliff Grove Association's grounds, at Glen Cove, L. I., and Miss Emily Beamor has been appointed operator. Another office has been opened on the same line in the Pavilion Hotel, at the steamboat landing at Glen Cove. All three of the Glen Cove offices on

## The Perils Of Being A Telegraph Operator During A Lightning Storm

- Or -

### Miss Fancher's Shocking Experience

The following account details one of the dangers which telegraph operators faced during electrical storms:

A terrific gale and storm, accompanied by unusual electric effect, swept over the north section of Long Island Saturday evening about 8:30. While the storm was at its height a vivid flash of lightning with quick following thunder startled the residents of Glen Cove. The streets and many houses and stores appeared to be a sheet of flaring electricity. Miss Fancher, the operator in the Western Union office in Roberts' building, was prostrated by the current. All wires of the Western Union, of which Glen Cove is the central station, were rendered useless and communication cut off.

— Brooklyn Daily Eagle  
16 July 1894

this line are doing an excellent business, and the people in that locality are much pleased at having secured such excellent telegraphic accommodations. The telegraph has long been needed in this section of the island, and will no doubt prove beneficial in furthering the rapid development which is now taking place, of its advantages as a summer residence and resort.

The first of the series of camp meetings which are to take place this summer at Sea Cliff Grove commenced on the Monday inst., and will continue for days.

The North Shore Telegraph Company connects\* with the Atlantic and Pacific Company at Brooklyn and New York. (Telegrapher, 1872c)

As the Western Union Telegraph Company continued its work on extending the line towards Oyster Bay, residents complained that it was erected crooked poles in the downtown area of Glen Cove. The editor of the Gazette merely said "what's the odds, so long as the messages go straight" (GC Gazette, 1872j)

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