



# KEY LOCK & LANTERN

## News Release

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## Train Excursion to Celebrate 160th Anniversary of Opening of Utica & Black River Railroad Line

During the summer of 1855, the rhythmic pounding of workmen's hammers rang out across the pastoral countryside around Remsen. Using little more than horse-drawn wagons and hand tools, laborers were working feverishly to extend the tracks of the Black River & Utica Railroad northward to Boonville. Earlier in the year, the previously insurmountable obstacle of Deerfield Hill had been conquered, with trains starting to carry passengers between Utica and Trenton Falls in January of 1855. Now, the railroad's promoters looked toward the next step in reaching their ultimate goal of Watertown and the Thousand Islands region.

Boonville was already a bustling town on the Black River Canal, which connected Rome with the navigable Black River at Lyons Falls, so it was a logical choice to be the next stop on the railroad. A locomotive was even shipped to Boonville on the canal, in order to expedite construction, and it pulled several short excursions for local residents in September of 1855. As winter approached, crews hurried to finish their work, and the first train from Utica arrived in Boonville on December 13, 1855.

Boonville was the end of the line for the next decade, as the high cost of construction caused financial difficulties for the railroad company. The reorganized Utica & Black River Railroad opened its next section to Lyons Falls in 1867, and eventually reached Sacketts Harbor on Lake Ontario in 1873. Later, the line was absorbed by the Rome, Watertown & Ogdensburg Railroad, which itself became part of the vast New York Central Railroad system by the end of the 19th century. During the glory days of the railroad, luxury Pullman cars carried vacationers over the line to the resorts of the Thousand Islands and into the heart of the Adirondacks.

Today, the old Utica & Black River route has returned to being a local line, much as it was 160 years ago. Trains of the Mohawk, Adirondack & Northern Railroad deliver freight cars from Utica to Boonville, but the tracks to Lyons Falls are not currently in use. Regularly scheduled passenger service stopped operating in the 1960's, and it has been many years since anyone has arrived in Boonville by train. However, on Saturday, June 6th, passengers will once again disembark from historic rail cars at the old station, as a special Adirondack Scenic Railroad excursion train makes the journey from Utica to Boonville.

Key, Lock & Lantern, a national non-profit organization of railroad historians and preservationists, is holding its annual convention in Utica this year, and the group will be retracing the route of the first train to Boonville, in celebration of the 160th anniversary of the railroad's opening. Vintage diesel locomotives and equipment from the heyday of railroading, now operated by the Adirondack Scenic Railroad, will carry passengers over the line through Marcy, Holland Patent, Remsen, and on to Boonville. Tickets are also available to the general public, and everyone with an interest in railroads and local history is invited to come along for the ride.

Key, Lock & Lantern's Boonville Dinner Express will depart from Utica Union Station at 4:00pm on Saturday, June 6th, and will arrive in Boonville at approximately 5:30pm. The train will wait there for two hours, allowing passengers to stroll around town and enjoy dinner on their own. Departure from Boonville will be at 7:30pm, with arrival back in Utica at approximately 9:00pm. Tickets may be purchased directly from the Adirondack Scenic Railroad at a cost of \$35 per person. Meals are not included in the ticket price, allowing passengers to eat at the establishment of their choice in Boonville.

The members of Key, Lock & Lantern meet each year to share information about railroads and historical preservation, and the rich transportation history of Utica has made the city an excellent location for the event. The 160th anniversary excursion over the Utica & Black River Railroad will be one of the highlights of the convention, which is being held in Utica for a second year in a row. "A train ride on the Adirondack Scenic Railroad was one of the most popular events in last year's program," said group president David Hamilton, "so it was an easy choice to come back to Utica and to arrange for this special trip." Other convention activities include a Railroad History Exposition, and a ride on the nearby Cooperstown & Charlotte Valley Railroad.

Additional information about the Boonville Dinner Express train, and other events at the Key, Lock & Lantern Convention at the historic Hotel Utica, is available on the organization's website at [www.klnl.org](http://www.klnl.org). Adirondack Scenic Railroad schedules and ticket information may be found on the railroad's website at [www.adirondackrr.com](http://www.adirondackrr.com), or by calling 315-724-0700.

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Photos for media use are available at [www.klnl.org](http://www.klnl.org)