

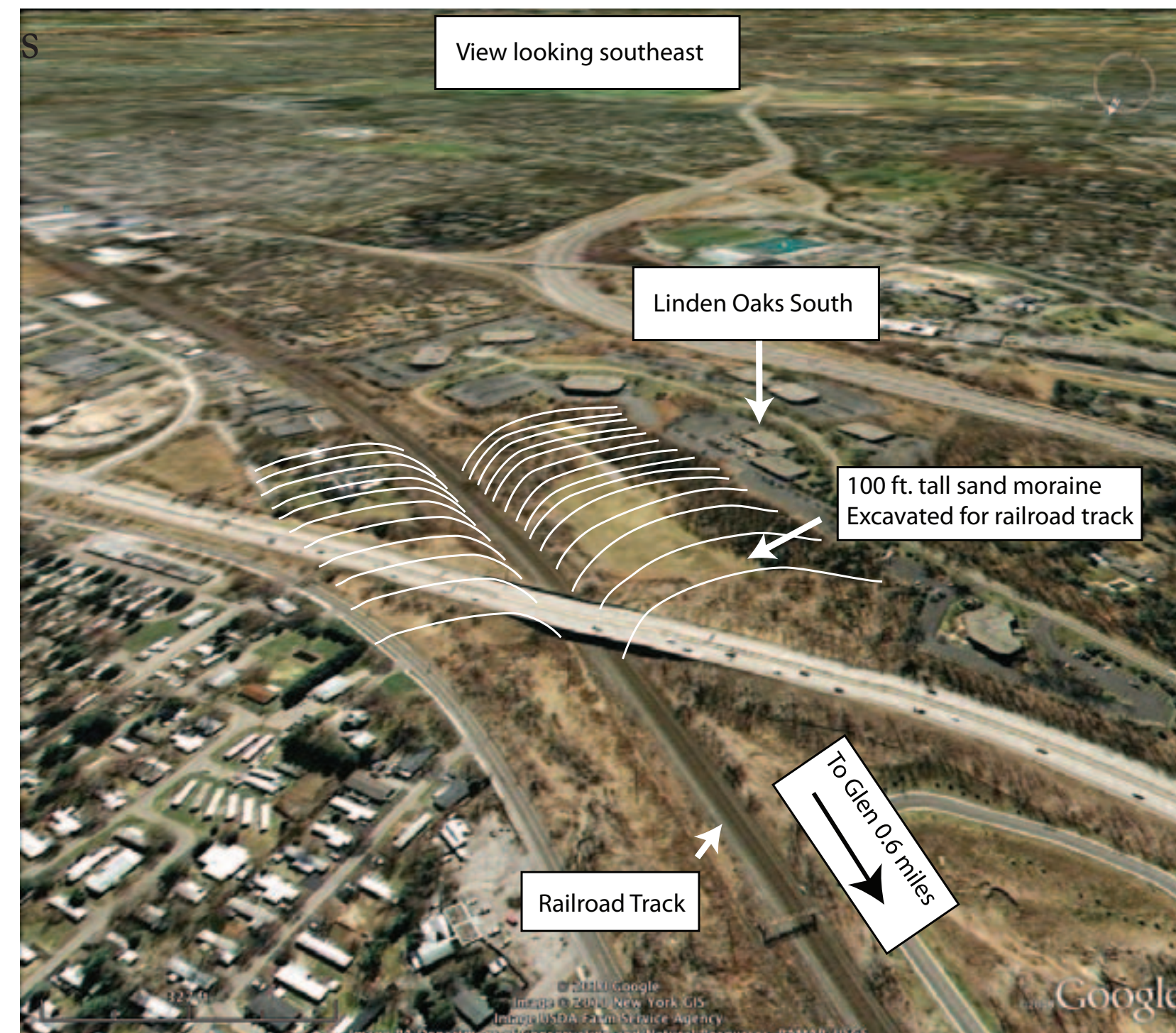
# The Notorious Sand Cut Southeast of the Glen

Many thanks to **Jim Weller** for providing this history of the Sand Cut and for allowing us to make use, in other posters, of his incomparable research on the history of the Glen and surrounding area.

Where Rte. 441 passes over the railroad tracks, at the eastern edge of the Linden Oaks Office Park, a baseball field has been laid out in a deep semicircular basin. Behind home plate and first and third bases, the land slopes steeply upward 100 or more feet and is covered by new growth scrub trees and vegetation. Even to the untrained eye, it is apparent the basin which contains the ball field was not made by mother-nature. The story of how a sand hill became a big hole is the story of Rochester and the railroad.

The story begins prior to 1850 when the predecessor to the NY Central Railroad laid railroad tracks from downtown to the towns and cities to the East. The goal of the civil engineers building the roadbed was to make it "straight and flat" wherever possible. As the track approached Allens Creek, "straight and flat" required a 650 foot long and 70 foot high wooden trestle to be built over the valley and the stream.

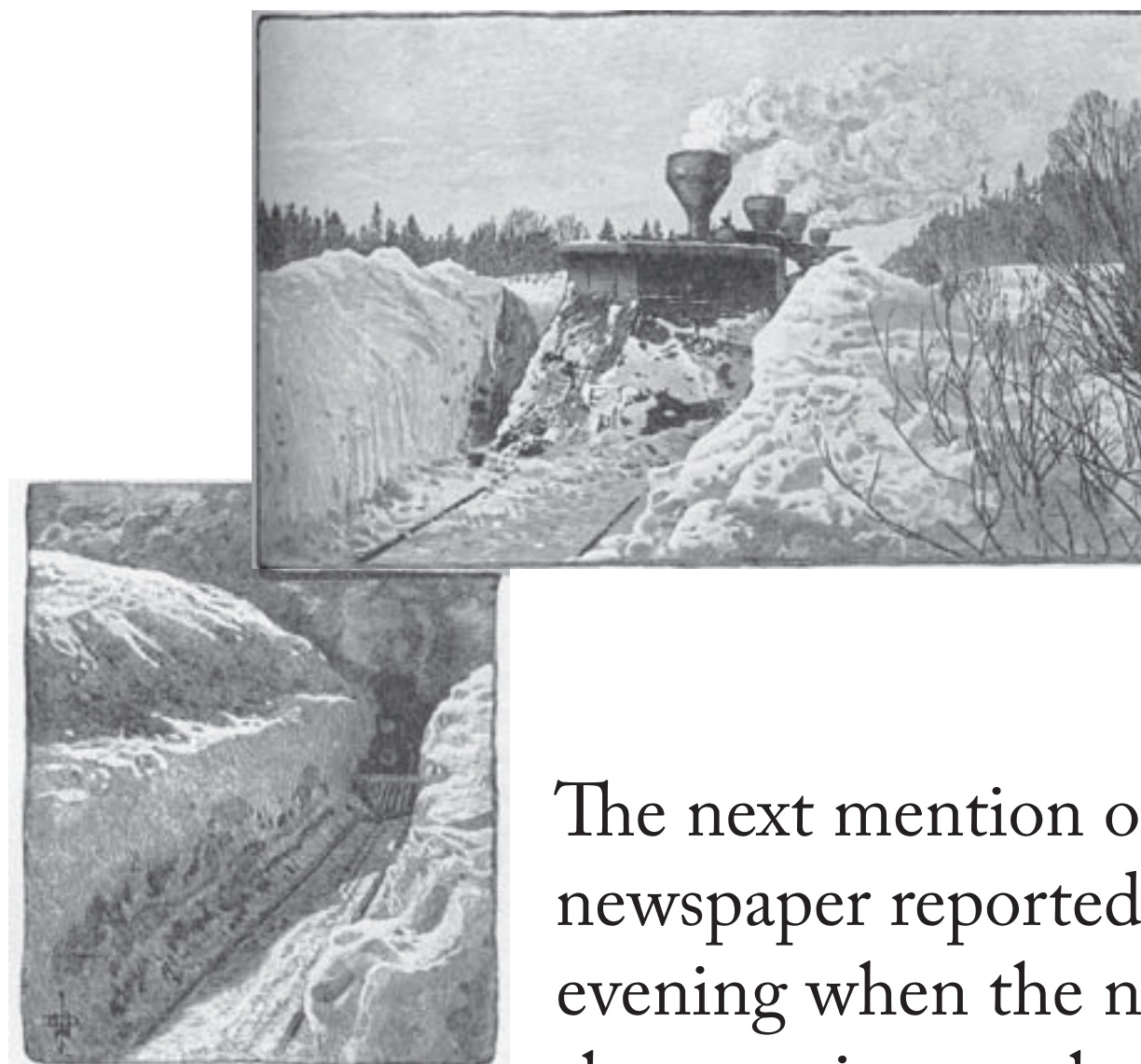
Just east of the trestle, [0.6 miles] a sand moraine sloped upwards from what are now the trailer parks all the way to East Avenue. "Straight & flat" meant cutting through the sand hill with a channel wide enough for one, and later two, and yet later again, four sets of railroad tracks. As the cut was made, the civil engineers realized the sand they were removing made an ideal fill and ballast for the low spots that were ahead. The "Sand Cut", as it soon became known, quickly became a pit where sand was commercially mined both by the railroad and private contractors.



The unusual topography of the sand cut was the cause of several spectacular train wrecks. The near invisibility of the trains to the scattered farm houses in the area made it a notorious location for train robberies in the late 1800's.

### This is where it gets interesting.

The first mention of the "Sand Cut" was on **12-24-1868** in the Union and Advertiser when it was reported that an early winter snow storm had delayed the arrival of the "Steamboat Express" passenger train due to a stalled freight train at the "Sand Cut in Brighton".



The next mention of the "Sand Cut" was on **12-31-1874** when the local newspaper reported "A queer drawback on railroading was cited last evening when the night express train from the east at three o'clock in the morning on the Central Railroad was stalled at the Sand Cut east of

the City by head winds and sand blowing upon the track. An extra engine was sent to bring the train to the Depot."

**Jan. 3, 1879** a spectacular train wreck occurred at the Sand Cut. **Sixteen years later** the D&C published (02-10-1895) an embellished account of the wreck that appears to have reflected the local lore that the wreck occurred after Mr. Vandebilt had ordered extraordinary efforts be made to release the train, stalled at the cut by snow, because his daughter-in-law was a passenger.

Below is an account of the wreck, taking a fresh look at the evidence and based on the points of agreement found in the contemporary news accounts of **1879**.

All accounts agree that the train left Rochester on Saturday afternoon, Jan. 3, 1879, at 4:30 pm. As a significant snow storm had been blowing for several days, the train was fronted by a large snowplow on the lead locomotive. Seven additional locomotives were under steam each with its own tender, engineer and fireman. These engines pulled 3 sleeping cars, 2 common passenger cars, 3 combination mail, express and baggage cars and a caboose.

The train was able to move forward at a speed of approximately 15 mph when it hit a 15 ft. high snow and sand drift at the Sand Cut. The effect was to telescope the engines on top of each other and to de-rail and scatter them onto the other three sets of tracks. The lead engineer was killed and other train personnel were injured. No passengers were hurt and all of the other cars stayed on the tracks.

Help was summoned and rescue efforts were mounted from the west (Rochester), the east (Syracuse and Fairport) and from the local farmers. Little is know as to what assistance was given by the locals other than it was praised by the passengers. From the east came a sleigh load of provisions from Fairport plus a wrecker train from Syracuse and a snowplow and workers from Fairport. The major effort came from the west with at least two large trains (eight engines) with 100's of men with snow shovels being dispatched to the site. After two days of digging, plowing and recovering and righting the engines, the tracks were cleared and the passengers, were returned to Rochester.

Among the notable passengers on board were **J.H. Rutter**, the General Traffic Mgr. of the NYC RR and Hamilton **McK Twombly**. Both men (and their spouses) were returning to NYC from the funeral of **George J. Whitney** of Rochester. Whitney was the son of Warham Whitney, one of the pioneer flour millers of Rochester. GJW, who inherited his father's business, was a member of the Board of the NYC RR. H. McK Twombly was a partner with Whitney in Whitney & Twombly, operators of major grain elevators in Buffalo, Rochester & NYC and which were linked to the railroad. Twombly's wife was the daughter of **William H. Vanderbilt**, the Pres. of the NYC RR and who, at that time, was reputed to be the **richest man in the world**. The suggestion that the presence of these very influential individuals may have inspired local railroad management to spare no effort in rescuing the passengers is worthy of consideration.

Edited for brevity from an unpublished manuscript by **Jim Weller**. Notes and emphasis added.

## This spectacular accident made international news.



This newspaper print is owned by The Rochester Historical Society. It was donated by a relation of the Watsons, a prominent Rochester family. Notice the handwritten notes on the top indicating that this event occurred when newly married James and Jeanette Miller were on the train.