

Eric Weber

Admin · August 20 at 2:49 PM

On August 20, 1831 Edgar M. Chandler was born in New Lebanon, NY, just a few miles across the state line from Pittsfield. With his wife Caroline and infant daughter Mary, he came here about 1867 or '68 to become Williamsburg's Station Agent and the conductor on the NH & N RR's daily run between Williamsburg and New Haven, CT.

On the morning of May 16, 1874 he got up early and boarded the train for New Haven as usual. Arriving there late in the morning, he received the news via telegraph that his home on Mill Street, all the houses near it, the street itself and the land along it, and 57 villagers including his wife and daughter, had been washed away in the Williamsburg Reservoir disaster.

The Chandlers' house had been right in the center of the floodway, and Caroline and Mary, out of earshot of the shouted warnings, had never stood a chance of survival. When photographers descended on the shattered village soon afterward, one captured this heart-rending image of a man in a railroad conductor's cap holding a framed picture in his hand, wandering stunned through a landscape stripped by the flood of landmarks that had been familiar to him. I suspect this is Mr. Chandler, searching the ruins for any traces of his home and family. He is standing in what many decades later became the James School playground.

Photo on page below

