

*Empire State Express*



**February 2020**

PUBLICATION OF THE NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER NRHS, INC.

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The meeting of the Chapter will be held on Friday, February 14, 2020 at 7:00 PM at the Degraff Community Center, 139 Division St., North Tonawanda, NY.

## **DANGER LIGHTS**

The 1930 classic movie **Danger Lights** was filmed on the Milwaukee Road. Featuring great cinematography it tells the story of a tough boss of a railroad yard who befriends a young hobo, and unwittingly places in jeopardy his relationship with the woman he loves. Louis Wolheim plays the boss of the railroad yard in Miles City, Montana. The film opens with a landslide across the tracks in Montana, and a repair crew is dispatched to clear the tracks. Several hobos are lounging nearby and are put to work helping the repair crew. One of the hobos, played by Robert Armstrong, is discovered to have been a former railroad engineer who lost his job due to insubordination. He is given a new job for the railroad by the yard boss, but quickly falls in love with the boss's fiancée, played by Jean Arthur.

Jealousy grows between the two over the affections of Arthur with both of them attempting to win her in marriage. Things come to a head during a fight in the railroad yard between the two, during which Wolheim is hit by a train and injured. To save his life, Armstrong must transport him in record time to Chicago for surgery.

This is period melodrama with a railroad theme. Bring your popcorn.



## FROM THE PRESIDENT



We have been very fortunate this winter in that we have been able to get into the parking lot at the Station on a regular basis. Usually at this time of year the plows have left a frozen snowbank across the driveway and the lot is sometimes covered in half a foot of snow. There being limited access to the building, work on projects falls off and we lose the first quarter of the year.

This year has been different. We have been able to put away the holiday decorations, and work on some other things. We have received some donations of materials from members and others which we are sorting, evaluating and cataloging. We had visitors on two occasions, and I think that's a first. Greg Gerstung is doing a research project for one of the town historians. This is in relation to a proposed rails-to-bike-path project. He has been examining some of the materials from the files in the archives known as the "Dumpster Files". These are materials from the IRC that were discarded by their successor and then rescued and donated to us. There are several bound books of maps showing areas of service and routes and most are nearly a hundred years old. The material is in remarkably good condition. We will be adding these to the list of items to be scanned to digital form. Some of the items waiting to be scanned are extremely fragile and must be recorded sooner than later.

We will be at the WNYRHS train show at the Fairgrounds over the weekend of February 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. Help with set up and take down is always appreciated, particularly with carrying things in and out.

In another form of recording history, I made the offer earlier to assist anyone who has a story to tell. We published my Dads story about the steer that came to visit Central Terminal in September. If you have a story to tell, let us help you get it into print.

Have you made your reservation for the 80<sup>th</sup> Banquet yet? Don't wait too long!

Looking ahead to the Museum Season (May through December, usually), we are looking at the current displays in the station and evaluating what we might refresh or retire and replace.

There has been some concern about the continuing availability of the meeting room. This is due to the fact that the Degraff hospital building is for sale. As of this writing we still have the use of the Community Center, but we do not know if that will change with the sale of the hospital building, if or when that might happen. We are looking around for an alternate site just in case. In the event that we do have to change the venue, we will try to give you as much notice as we can.

In the event that we have to cancel the meeting due to the weather, the first place to look is Channel 2 on your TV. We will ask the other stations to carry it, but we are registered with Channel 2. We will also ask the usual radio stations as well; they being Odies 104 FM and WGR 550AM and WYRK 106.5 FM. We usually try to make the decision soon enough to make the 5 PM broadcasts.

I see that we have a high green on the distant signal, so let's notch out the throttle!  
Until then, I'll see you at the Meeting.

Jim Ball

## INTERURBAN INTERLUDE

Over 100 years ago the era of the *Interurban*, electric powered intercity railways was in full swing. New York State was particularly well served with a network of these railways linking much of Upstate. The number of companies, variety of services, and frequency of schedule boggles the imagination today. Locally, one could travel from Buffalo to the north to Niagara Falls or via North Tonawanda to Lockport on the International Railway and beyond to Rochester on the Buffalo, Lockport & Rochester. Connections beyond Syracuse to Albany were only broken by a 31 mile gap between Little Falls and Fonda. If westbound, one could board one of the convenient Buffalo & Lake Erie Traction cars and head towards Westfield, NY and beyond to Erie, PA. Around the Albany area, several companies vied for travelers to Troy, Schenectady and Hudson. It was a short lived era, mainly taking place prior to the First World War but was colorful in its own way. Electricity was the wonder of the modern age and the interurban, for just a brief moment, seemed like it would eclipse the steam railroad. Even the New York Central owned some of the action, and itself was experimenting with electric traction along the West Shore at Oneida out of the necessity to replace steam locomotives in the City of New York at Grand Central. The great electric-locomotive-served terminal we know today was just one of the off-shoots of the Interurban era. And those cars could be luxurious. Parlor cars, brass railed observation cars, and even limited dining services were offered on some lines in those glory years. The cars themselves were often magnificent examples of craftsmanship, with mahogany and walnut paneled interiors, stained glass clerestory windows and other luxury appointments to woo the traveler off of what were also quite comfortable steam train accommodations. The rise of the internal combustion engine in personal motor cars along with improved, paved highways would replace the great electric railway grids that once upon a time seemed to be the wave of the future. JCD



Empire United Railways and its parlor car "Syracuse" offered a regal way to get from Rochester to Syracuse in the interurban era. Ironically the short, express train is passing one of those upstart "motor vehicle" companies that eventually doomed the industry.



**NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER  
NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
INVITES ALL TO OUR  
**80th ANNUAL BANQUET**  
Saturday, March 21, 2020



Ilio Di Paolo's Restaurant  
3785 South Park Ave  
Blasdell, NY 14219

*Note Earlier Time!* ⇨ 11:30 am Cash Bar, 12:30 pm Dinner ⇐  
Raffle, 50/50 & Program Following

**Dinner Selection**

Dinner will be served Family Style:  
The talented culinary staff of Ilio Di Paolo's will prepare an exquisite array of mouth-watering dishes for our dining pleasure. Chicken Orvietto & Beef Roulades will be featured, along with potatoes, penne pasta and mixed vegetables. Coffee or tea and dessert will be served. Also available is a vegetarian selection: Eggplant Parmigiana with Marinara sauce.  
Indicate number of vegetarian meals on order coupon below  
\$25.00 person

**Entertainment**

The 2020 banquet presenter will be Mr. Jerry Bertoldo. Jerry is an avid historian of the once very extensive dining car service on the New York Central Railroad. Using historic photos and many delightful anecdotes, his talk will review the glory years of the dining car. Buffalo was a major commissary point on the Water Level Route for the restocking and servicing of the dining car fleet. Jerry will appear dressed as a NYC dining car waiter. This program will appeal to anyone who ever had the pleasure of partaking in a 'dinner in the diner' on a moving train!

Reservation Coupon must be received with full remittance no later than Saturday, March 7, 2020.  
For information call Becky Gerstung 434-5665 or Nancy Andrycha at 822-5111.

Note: No confirmations will be mailed. You may pick up your tickets at the door.

Mail Reservations to: Nancy Andrycha  
49 Seward Street  
Buffalo, NY 14206-3552

>> > Cut Here >> >>

Reservation Coupon

Banquet March 21, 2020

Make Checks payable to **Niagara Frontier Chapter NRHS, Inc.** \$\_\_\_\_\_ Total

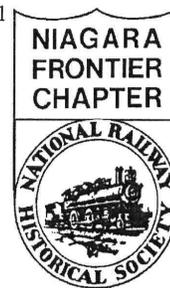
Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street and City \_\_\_\_\_

State and Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No. \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate number of Vegetarian meals here: \_\_\_\_\_



**PLEASE NOTE, SEATING IS LIMITED!**

## ON THE TRACK AHEAD

Looking ahead to the regular March meeting, our member Walter Simpson returns with an in depth look at turbine driven locomotives. The short lived experiment in motive power has its own fascinating story, and Walter recently authored a book, published by Kalmbach, on just this subject.

## CONTENT NEEDED FOR THE EMPIRE STATE EXPRESS

Your editor is always on the lookout for publishable material for the ESX. Lately, we have had a dearth of submissions. Without much content to draw upon, we have to reduce the number of pages in the monthly printing. Can you write about some aspect of railroading, relate anecdotal stories of working on the line if you were a railroader? Do you have some historic photos you would like to share? We can use all those and more in the pages of the Empire State Express. Contact the editor with any questions. The email is [newsletter@nfcnrhs.com](mailto:newsletter@nfcnrhs.com)

## 80<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL BANQUET SATURDAY MARCH 21



New York Central was famous for its great passenger trains and the dining car services on these trains was a large part of that persona. This will be our feature program at the 80<sup>th</sup> annual banquet, Join us Saturday, March 21, 2020 at Ilio di Paolo's restaurant on South Park Avenue, Blasdell. Dining room opens 11:30 AM, dinner served at 12:30 PM. Mr. Jerry Bertoldo will relate the story of New

York Central's dining car services, focusing on Buffalo, which was a major commissary point for the Great Steel Fleet. The flyer with all details and reservation coupon is included again with this issue of ESX. Get your reservations in to the banquet committee ASAP. As always, the banquet will also feature a great silent auction, 50/50 split and a prize raffle.



## CHAPTER CALENDAR

- FEB 14 Regular meeting at Degraff Community Center, 7 PM “Danger Lights” – classic railroad action movie from 1930 filmed on The Milwaukee Road.
- FEB 15/16 WNYRHS Winter train show, 10 AM to 4 PM. Volunteers always welcome to assist at our table.
- MAR 13 Regular meeting at Degraff Community Center, 7 PM Turbine Locomotives by Walter Simpson.
- MAR 21 80<sup>th</sup> Annual banquet March 21, Ilio Di Paolo’s, doors open 11:30 AM, dinner served 12:30 PM. New York Central’s Dining Car Service by Mr. Jerry Bertoldo

The Niagara Frontier Chapter NRHS, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) publicly supported organization. Contributions may be deductible for income tax purposes in accordance with the Internal Revenue Service.

**\*\*\* IMPORTANT REMINDERS \*\*\*** If you receive hardcopy of the ESX and your mailing address changes, please send to the attention of Neal Kerin so that your Empire State Express can be addressed properly. Likewise, if your email address changes for any reason, please let Tony Schill know by sending it to the [newsletter@nfcnrhs.com](mailto:newsletter@nfcnrhs.com) THANK YOU

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