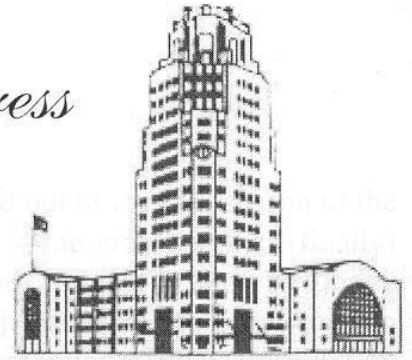


# Empire State Express



**JANUARY 2024**

PUBLICATION OF THE NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER NRHS, INC.

Editor: John C. Dahl    Email nfcnrhs@gmail.com

**The meeting of the Chapter is scheduled for Friday, January 12, 2024 at 7:00 PM at the Town of Wheatfield Community / Senior Center, 2790 Church Road, North Tonawanda NY. Follow Rt 62 north to Ward Rd, turn left onto Ward Road and turn right onto Church Road.**

## **RAILROADING IN 2023**

January's meeting program will be a "Review of 2023" presented by Mark Klingel who says: "2023 was an interesting year for railfans and the railroad industry, especially in Western New York. Our railroad scene saw a lot of events occur and is experiencing some noticeable changes. We will also take a look at some of my personal favorite photos and highlights from outside of New York in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Ohio."

Join us at the meeting. Mark is a US Coast guardsman, stationed in Buffalo and a first class photographer.



*Venerable center cab diesels of the Arcade & Attica lead a railfan photo special over Cattaraugus Creek in Arcade on a spectacularly beautiful summer day. July 13, 2023. Mark Klingel photo*



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The year of 2023 is rapidly winding down as I write this. It was a landmark year in the history of the organization. Looking back, as we always do at this time of year, I'm amazed at what transpired in just one year. We received the DRI grant. The 25-ton GE loco was donated to us by ADM. We had a movie made in our Station (shown at the December meeting). We had a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony with a Picnic. We received a \$6,700 grant from the Niagara County Legislature for HVAC work for the Archive Room Expansion. The HVAC work is finished and with that, so is the project! It only took eight years. It should be noted that the Archive Room Expansion was not funded by the DRI grant. We did that.

We applied for and received a William G. Pomeroy Foundation grant for a Historic Marker (the so called "Spy Marker"), installed and dedicated it. Just this month we have been approved for a marker for our tower EL-2!! Stand by for more on that as we go.

We are working to fill out the Program Schedule for the first half of 2024. I have the responsibility to see that we have a program for every meeting. I have been fortunate to have had a lot of help with that, but I would really like to have someone else do this. Program Coordinator anyone?

We have had ongoing problems with getting the ESX into the hands of the members in a timely fashion. Ye Editor and the rest of the publications committee have agreed to shortening the deadline by a week to cure this. Let us hope that this is the right medicine.

The Museum, which in the past was usually closed for the first quarter of the year, is mostly now open. We never did publish that we were open during the first quarter, we had a hard time getting there ourselves. We now have a paved parking lot. We have engaged a local plowing service to deal with any white stuff three inches and up. We are working toward having the Museum open one Saturday a month during the winter. Once this is established, we can advertise the Museum as a year round attraction. As far as restoration and maintenance go, the usual Saturday program will continue now that the Holidays are over.

Speaking of winter, should we need to cancel the monthly meeting because of the weather, look to the usual sources for information. On your TV, channel 2, on the radio WGR 550AM, Oldies 104.1FM and WYRK 106.5FM. We try to make the cancellation decision early enough to make the 5 pm broadcasts. When in doubt, err on the side caution.

The Chapter 2024 Calendar is still available as of this writing, but it is very close to selling out. The Committee has done an excellent job. Considering everything else that was going on, they brought a truly fine product in on time and on budget. Be sure to get one before they're gone.

I must include a big Thank You to all the Officers and Directors who were re-elected in December. We still have some work to do, but their commitment and dedication will take us a long way. It is an honor to work with you. I don't know how we could top 2023, but stay tuned, it's going to be a great year! Be sure to send in your renewal, and if you can, a donation. You won't want to miss any of this.

*Jim Ball*



# **Cabin Fever Train Ride**

## **GO Train Round Trip From Niagara Falls, Ont. to Toronto**

### **Saturday, February 10, 2024**

- **Depart Niagara Falls, Ont VIA / GO Station: 12:04pm**
- **Arrive Toronto Union Station: 2:24pm**
  
- **Depart Toronto Union Station: 5:03pm**
- **Arrive Niagara Falls, Ont VIA / GO Station: 7:23pm**

**Round Trip Fare - \$10.00 CDN  
(Approximately \$7.50 USD)**

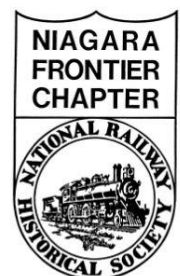
*During The 2 1/2 Hour Layover...*

*See The Recent Improvements At Toronto Union Station,  
Enjoy A Snack In The New Food Court Or Take In A Ride On The TTC!*



**Full Trip Information  
& Registration  
at [www.nfcnrhs.org](http://www.nfcnrhs.org)**

**(Registration Required By February 8th)**



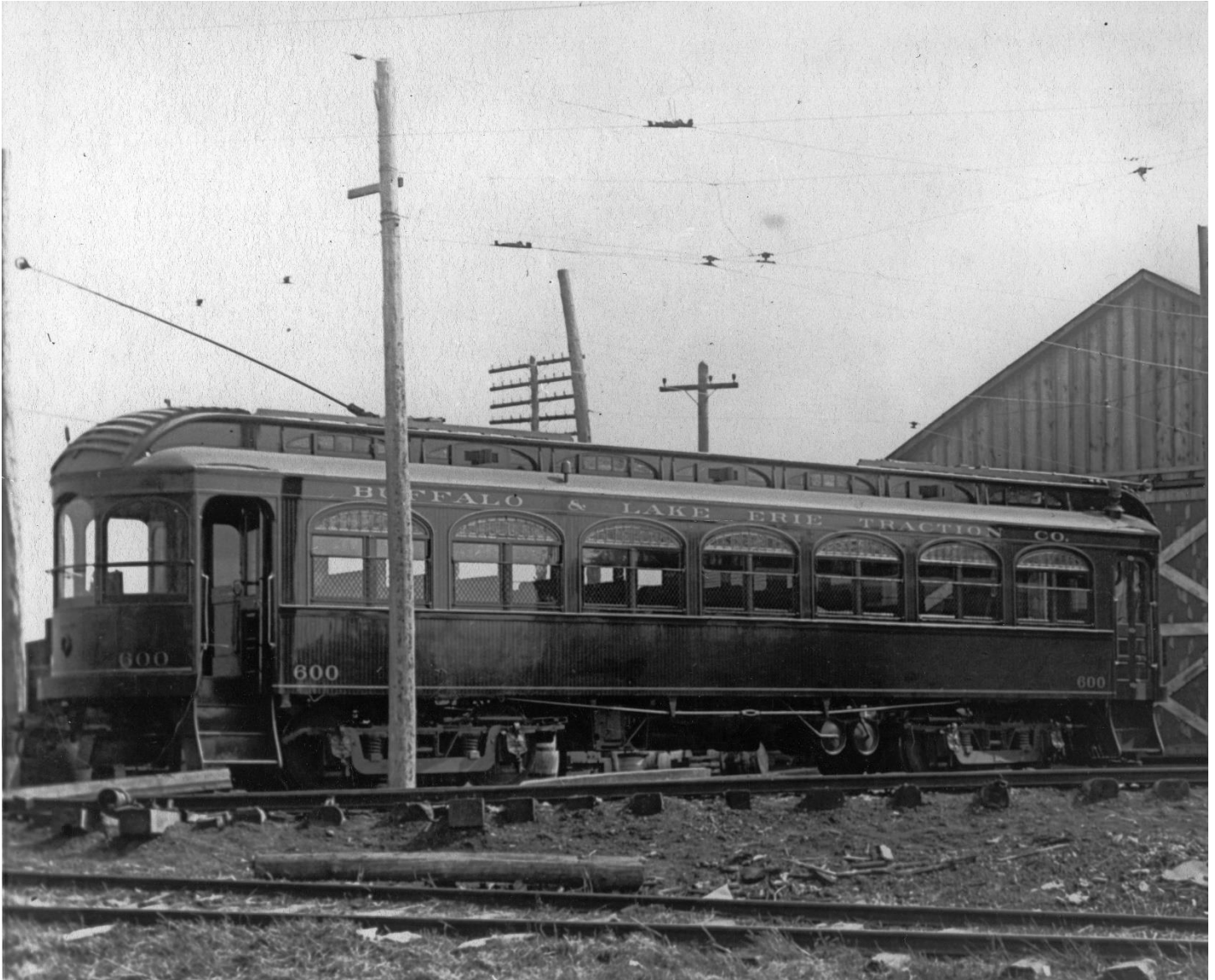


## THOSE INTERURBAN LINES THAT LINKED OUR CITIES

Story by **Richard E. Baldwin**

*Photos from the collection of the late Albert D. Kerr, now housed at Niagara Frontier Chapter, NRHS archives*

*Originally published September 7, 1975 in the Sunday Courier-Express magazine.*



Buffalo may have a new trolley car system within the next few years, but it won't be any match for the old-time trolley network that stretched 1087 miles – all the way from Elkhart Lake, Wis., to Oneonta, N.Y.

Transportation planners will try to decide this fall whether to build a trolley line, a subway or a “busway” from Downtown Buffalo to the new campus of the University of Buffalo in Amherst. Their preliminary studies favor a subway, but a trolley line or busway could be built for a lot less money. In today's cost conscious economy it is entirely possible that Buffalo will wind up with a brand new trolley car system or with more buses instead of a subway.

## **THOSE INTERURBAN – continued**

If the decision is to bring back trolleys, the Queen City of the Lakes will return to a system which everybody thought had reached the end of the line here on July 1, 1950, when buses took over the last of the city's street car routes.

At the zenith of the trolley era- from about 1910 to 1922 – electric cars provided not only city and suburban service in many Western New York communities, they also served interurban routes connecting such cities as Rochester, Lockport, Niagara Falls, the Tonawandas, Buffalo, Dunkirk, Jamestown and Erie, Pa.

The route from Erie, through Dunkirk, Buffalo and Lockport to Rochester was part of that 1,087-mile network of interurban lines that made up the longest continuous trip anyone ever could have taken by trolley cars or electric "third rail" railways.

There were, of course, many other trolley systems in the United States and Canada, but they did not connect directly with the route between Elkhart Lake and Oneonta. Or, if they did connect, they only offered side trips, which did not move the traveler any closer to his final destination.

Of course, there is no record of anyone's actually having taken the entire 1,087-mile trip which would have required passing through parts of six states on 22 separate lines, some of which did not have direct connections with one another. Besides, such a long trip would have been faster and more convenient on a regular steam train.

The portion of the trip through Western New York would have involved taking the Buffalo & Lake Erie Traction Co. from Erie to Buffalo, the International Railway Co. from Buffalo to Lockport, and the Buffalo, Lockport and Rochester Railway from Lockport to Rochester. And it would have required the paying of a separate fare on each line.

Although Buffalonians could have traveled westward to Chicago and beyond entirely by electric trolleys, they never could have gone eastward all the way to New York City or even to Albany, because there were gaps in the interurban system between Little Falls and Fonda and between Hudson and Tarrytown.

Possibly the longest organized trip ever taken entirely by interurban railway was that of 22 businessmen from Utica who chartered an electric car in 1910 for a round trip between Utica and Louisville, Ky.

While such long trolley rides were exceptions to the general practice, shorter trips on the electric interurbans of Western New York were highly popular in the days before almost everybody had an automobile. Among the most popular were the summer excursions to Olcott Beach on Lake Ontario in Niagara County; and the spectacular Great Gorge Route along the Niagara River between Niagara Falls and Lewiston did a brisk business during the tourist season.

For Buffalonians who wanted to stay closer to home, the International Railway Co. operated 27 city routes and there were 16 or 17 suburban lines to such places as the Tonawandas, Williamsville, Lancaster, Lackawanna, Orchard Park, and Hamburg.

Trolley cars also served both sides of Chautauqua Lakes between Jamestown and Westfield; another system served Little Valley, Salamanca, Olean and Bradford, Pa. and Batavia had a small city system.

Canadian trolleys connected with those on the United States side of the Niagara River at Niagara Falls and Lewiston, and they provided service to Chippewa, Ont. And to the Toronto steamboat dock at Queenston, Ont.

## THOSE INTERURBAN -continued

The trolleys were designed principally to carry passengers back and forth between home and work or shopping, and occasionally to take them to one of the many amusement parks or picnic groves which they served.



But they had a more somber function, too.

Buffalo's International Railway Co. operated two funeral cars-the Elmlawn and the Greenwood-whose sole purpose was to carry the coffin and floral arrangements, pallbearers and mourners to local cemeteries. Forst Lawn Cemetery had its own siding where the coffin could be unloaded and the trolley would wait while the mourners got out and walked to the gravesite. At other cemeteries, the funeral car would stop on the main line, then return later to pick up the mourners after the burial service.

On a more commercial note, the trolleys also carried small express packages, shipments of fresh fruit and sometimes even carloads of freight. Fruit trains ran regularly during the 1920s along the interurban tracks from the Lake Ontario orchards to Buffalo so fresh fruit could be on city breakfast tables each morning.

Buffalo had entered the street railway era in 1834, when horses drew the first simple cars along a track on Niagara Street between what today is Downtown Buffalo and the docks at the foot of Ferry Street in Black Rock. By 1860, two rival street railway companies were operating horse-drawn cars here, one of them following almost the same route as did the pioneering 1834 railway on Niagara Street.

## **THOSE INTERURBAN -continued**

Horse car lines sprung up on many of Buffalo's major streets in the 1870s and 1880s, and electric power was introduced in 1889.

All of the lines were electrified within the next few years. But the last horse car was not seen here until 1907 when it made a run up and down Main Street during an Old Home Week celebration as a remembrance of the past.

Prospects for the trolley business were so good that 27 separate companies were formed here through the years, all of them eventually consolidated or merging into the International Railway Co., predecessor of the Niagara Frontier Transit System and of today's Metro Bus system.

The various companies have had their share of strikes and other labor trouble, but the employees have come a long way since 1870 when conductors and drivers on the horse cars were paid \$1.65 a day for working from 6 in the morning until 8 at night (and sometimes until midnight), with only 15 minutes off for dinner and 15 minutes for supper.

In 1885, they still were working an average of 16 hours a day, seven days a week. And a company rule prohibited "disparaging remarks by employees about the management of the road or its officers".

The horse cars were replaced by electric trolleys, and the trolleys began to give way to buses in the 1920s and 1930s.

By 1941, only 13 street car lines remained in Buffalo, and they were to be converted to bus service as soon as possible. The last cars on the Jefferson Avenue and William Street lines ran on the night of April 19, 1941. The Seneca Street and South Park routes were changed to bus service late in September, 1941.

But then World War II intervened, new buses were not available and the remaining trolleys were kept in service "for the duration".

The East Utica, Sycamore, Clinton, Main, Parkside-Zoo and Kensington lines were "bused" after The War. The last to go were the Fillmore, Broadway and Genesee routes, all of which closed down on July 1, 1950.

A brass band accompanied a procession of seven street cars on that last trip. They were greeted by the roar of aerial bombs and the flight of dozens of colored balloons as they passed Broadway and Fillmore around 6 that evening. The cars were draped with black bunting, and some of them bore banners reading "Final Curtain", "End of the Trail" or "The Last Long Mile".

Not far behind were the new 45-passenger buses which would replace the street cars.

The cars were taken to the NFT's Hertel Yard for possible sale to some other transit system, but there were no takers so they were burned and scrapped. No a single Buffalo trolley car was saved.

A Courier-Express reporter at the time considered it a good riddance. He called the decrepit Buffalo trolleys "one of the cruelest instruments of torture" because of the way the worn-out machines lurched along poorly maintained track which was supposed to have been scrapped years earlier.

It seemed like a good idea when the more modern and flexible buses replaced the trolleys. But nobody could foresee the effect that the fuel-guzzling, traffic-choking, air-polluting buses would have on the environment in the mid-1970s.

## **THOSE INTERURBAN -continued**

Today's traffic planners recognize that electric trolley cars do not burn fuel when they are stopped. They run on tracks which can be separated from vehicular traffic, they can be lighted and air conditioned with relatively little power, they do not burn gasoline or diesel fuel and they do not pollute the air. These are among the reasons for studying a possible return of trolley cars to Metropolitan Buffalo.

But if they do return, they will not be the same cars that The Courier-Express reporter called "instruments of torture". Instead, they will be sleek, new cars similar to the ones which have just been ordered for the streetcar system in Boston and San Francisco.

They will have comfortable seats for up to 68 passengers in each car, they will be air conditioned or ventilated with forced air, they may have high/low level steps to permit passenger boarding from street level or from high platforms, they may run in tunnels beneath the streets of downtown Buffalo, and they will be able to travel up to 50 miles and hour over smooth, new rails.

The trolleys may make a comeback in city and suburban service, no nobody expects a rebirth of the interurban system of the early 1900s. the automobile and the airlines seem to have taken car of that.



*Richard E. Baldwin is a long time member of the Chapter and formerly a reporter for the Courier-Express and later the Buffalo News. He was editor of ESX for several decades. I want to thank him for giving his permission to reprint this article he wrote some 48 years ago. The current debate over what to do about Route 33 and restoring Humbolt Parkway shows how little we really have learned in Buffalo about the value of rail based rapid transit. We have our Metro now but it has never been expanded and in recent years maintenance appears to have been lacking at many of the stations. It is underutilized at best and should have been extended to the suburbs years ago. Also a 'thank you' to Becky & Greg Gerstung for help in locating the photos and for digitizing them so they could be used in this issue of ESX. - JCD*

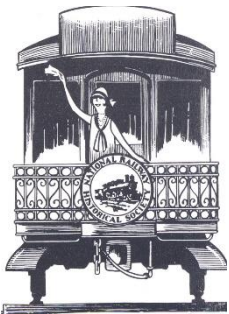


## SCENE ON THE LINE



Amtrak's Maple Leaf from Niagara Falls to New York City swings around the curve on the double track truss bridge across Ellicott Creek on the Tonawanda cutoff on November 9, 2023. New York Central's massive track relocation in the Twin Cities was completed one hundred and one years ago and remains a vital link in today's railroad now under CSX control. The bridge itself was relocated from the West Shore Railroad where an abandoned portion of the old Erie Canal was filled in a century ago. *Larry Gustina photo.*

## ON THE TRACK AHEAD



February's program is to be announced! We need presenters for many of our regular meeting months in 2024, with February and March still open, and all meetings September to December 2024 open! Can you help with a program? We have been looking for a volunteer to manage the program schedule for a while. Your help is needed if we are going to be able to keep offering quality meeting entertainment.

# CHAPTER CALENDAR

- JAN 12**      **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. Mark Klingel takes a look at contemporary railroading in Western New York and some other states.**
- FEB 9**        **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. PROGRAM NEEDED!**
- FEB 10**      **GO TRAIN winter cabin fever trip to Toronto. See flyer on page 3.**
- MAR**         **Chapter Banquet. Please stay tuned for details and date. It will be held at a NEW location in 2024. Details are still in progress.**

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.

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