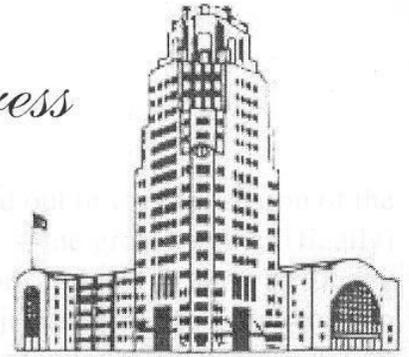


## Empire State Express



**DECEMBER 2022**

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, December 9, 2022 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.

### MEMBER'S PHOTO NIGHT



Our annual open house and Member's Photo night will be the program theme. Bring your photos in digital format on a USB memory stick to share with all on the big screen. If you have traditional slides, we can accommodate, but you must contact Jim Ball ahead of time, so we have the projector available. Please limit to a maximum of 15 minutes per person so that all will have time to share their pictures.

*Charles Dickens wrote in "A Christmas Carol" - "They are but shadows of things past." We see "shadows of things past" here; a fragment of the Erie's one time mainline to Dunkirk, NY, abandoned and forlorn. In the distance whistles like a ghost train echo in the frigid winter air of Dayton, NY. The fading sound is from a New York & Lake Erie "Santa Express" with Alco FPA4 locos heading downgrade and shouting out for each of the several road crossings on the nearby old Buffalo & Southwestern branch. December 4, 2021, JCD.*

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



The leaves have changed and now they have fallen. This month's calendar page is the last one for this year. We are beginning to hear the word "snow" repeatedly in the weather forecasts. Oh, wait, now the stuff is everywhere! The season being upon us, I need to review the meeting cancellation procedure, should we have to. We are listed with WGRZ TV channel 2. We send it to the other stations, but look to Channel 2 first. We also send it to radio stations WGR 550AM, Oldies 104.1 FM, WYRK 106.5FM. We try to make the decision soon enough to make the 5 pm broadcasts.

Neal has begun the process of sending out the renewal notices. I have already received mine. Please attend to that promptly and please be as generous as you can with your donations. All of your donations are carefully monitored so that they are invested in the project exactly as the donor intended. Those of us who work on the projects most certainly appreciate your donations.

The Chapter was all set to participate in the WNYRHS train show at the Fairgrounds on November 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup>. The show was cancelled by Mother Nature. Losing this show was a major disappointment to the railfan and modeling community. All we can do is to look forward to February 2023. Thanks to those who worked hard to get us ready.

Winterwalk will be Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>. The deadline line for this column is before the event happens and it will be over probably before you read this. The Museum will be open at 11 am with the usual yuletide decorations and now traditional hot chocolate and cookies. We understand that the man in the red suit will pay us a visit. The pony rides will be out front. Thanks to Becky, Greg, Bob and Nancy, Ben Hiltz, Randy Bugucki, John Dahl, and Steve and Karen Frey for getting the Museum ready.

There is published in this issue the list of Candidates running for election to the Board of Directors. This is in accordance with the Chapter Bylaws. The Election will be held at the December 9<sup>th</sup> meeting.

While preparing that list, I jotted down a quick list of the names of the people who seem to do everything in the organization. We have approximately one hundred members. That list includes all the Board members as expected, but also another half dozen names besides. Thanks to everyone who makes this all work. Many of them wear several hats.

While the job of Program Coordinator is not a Board position, we are in need of someone to fill the position. It requires that the person keep track of the program schedule and report to the members at the meeting. Is this something that you could do? Call Becky at 716 434-5665 to talk about it.

Next month, which is also next year (!), we'll look back at 2022 and assess how we did.

With that, as is the tradition in my family, let me wish all of you Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!

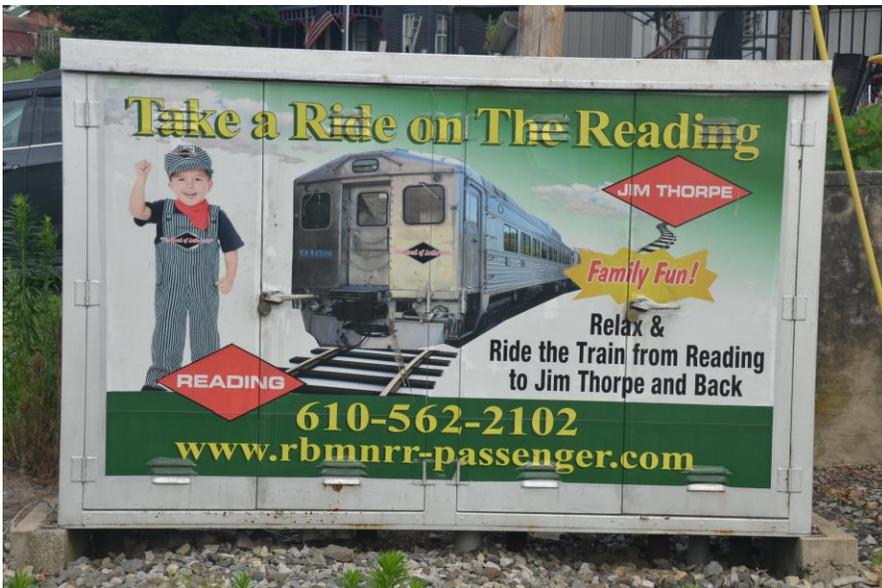
See you at the meeting?

*Jim Ball*

## SCENE ON THE LINE



Reading & Northern operates excursion “Budd” RDC (rail diesel car) service in the summer out of North Reading to Jim Thorpe, PA. Here, in the heritage lettering of the Reading Railroad is a northbound set of the vintage streamliners at Mohrsville, PA, Sunday, July 3, 2022. On the crossing cabinet is a R&N poster advertising these trips. A class operation in all regards, R&N also has 4-8-4 #2102 back under steam in excursion use, a set of handsome F-unit cab diesels, and its freight business is thriving. The big guys like NS & CSX could sure learn some valuable lessons in railroading and public relations from the Reading & Northern. *John C. Dahl photos.*



## SCENE ON THE LINE – A long time ago



At Buffalo Central Terminal, it is Sunday, December 7, 1941 and the new *Empire State Express* basks in the well wishes of Buffalonians who came out on a brisk winter day to greet the latest streamlined marvel in updated rail travel by the New York Central. A little over a week before, a shortened edition of the train was on public display along the Terminal's Curtiss Street team tracks near the REA Express Agency facility. The much-anticipated inaugural of service came complete with a newly issued public timetable and much fanfare in the railway trade press. The locomotives were of NYC's tried and true Hudson type, 4-6-4 wheel arrangement. West Albany shops fitted two J-3a engines, #5426 and #5429 (on our train this day) with the streamlined stainless-steel jackets.

Behind the tender a consist of all new, Budd-built stainless steel passenger equipment stretched back along the platform. (Does anyone know which specific platform was used on the inaugural day trip?) Heralded as "the Finest Daytime Train in the World", the promotional brochure rhapsodized on its beautiful, luxurious furnishings set within color schemes designed by Paul Cret, a master craftsman of the decorative arts. The train was air conditioned to provide even temperatures in summer and winter, and the air was continually washed to remove dust and dirt and was refreshed every few minutes. Cars were insulated to reduce road noise and tight-lock couplers reduced jarring actions upon starting and stopping. Trucks were fitted with roller bearings and twin-cushion, rubber draft gear contributed to smooth operation. State of the art fluorescent lighting fixtures "prevented eyestrain and add to the pleasure of every trip." The full train consisted of sixteen cars and included a mail-baggage car, tavern-lounge-baggage car, three parlor cars, eight coaches, two dining cars, and a unique rounded-end tavern-lounge-observation car. Today's train is of course east bound. The train will make limited stops and will be due into New York City's Grand Central Terminal at 9:30 PM. Some members of the then Buffalo Division of the Railway Enthusiasts, including John M. Prophet, rode from Buffalo to Rochester this day to sample the new train's accommodations. A movie in our Chapter archive (shown at the September 2022 meeting) captures the historic departure of this inaugural train.

But little did anyone in this crowd know that nearly simultaneous with this picture being exposed and committed to film, that catastrophic events were soon to be unfolding at Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands, and that the United States and all its railways would soon be at war! *Photo: Bob Scheib collection.*

## 2023 OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

In accordance with Chapter by-laws, here is the list of Candidates for Election to the Board of Directors for 2023. The election will be held at the December 2022 meeting.

Name	Office
James V. Ball	President
Gregory G. Gerstung	Vice President
Vacant	Second Vice President
Bruce Becker	Treasurer
Nancy Andrycha	Corresponding Secretary
Rebecca Gerstung	Recording Secretary
Neil Keirn	Membership Secretary
Karen Frey	Comptroller
John C. Dahl	Chapter Director, Editor
Mark Lewandowski	Interorganizational Coordinator
David Skoney	Chapter Director, Historian
Robert Andrycha	Chapter Director, Museum
Randy Bugucki	Chapter Director, Equipment Restoration
Albert Le Teste	Chapter Director, Head Groundskeeper
Steve Frey	Chapter Director, Road Foreman of Engines
Benton Hiltz	Chapter Director, Procurement Officer



Smith Mills, NY a tiny farming community on the Erie RR's one-time mainline, in Chautauqua County was in the midst of a "lake effect" storm over 100 years ago.

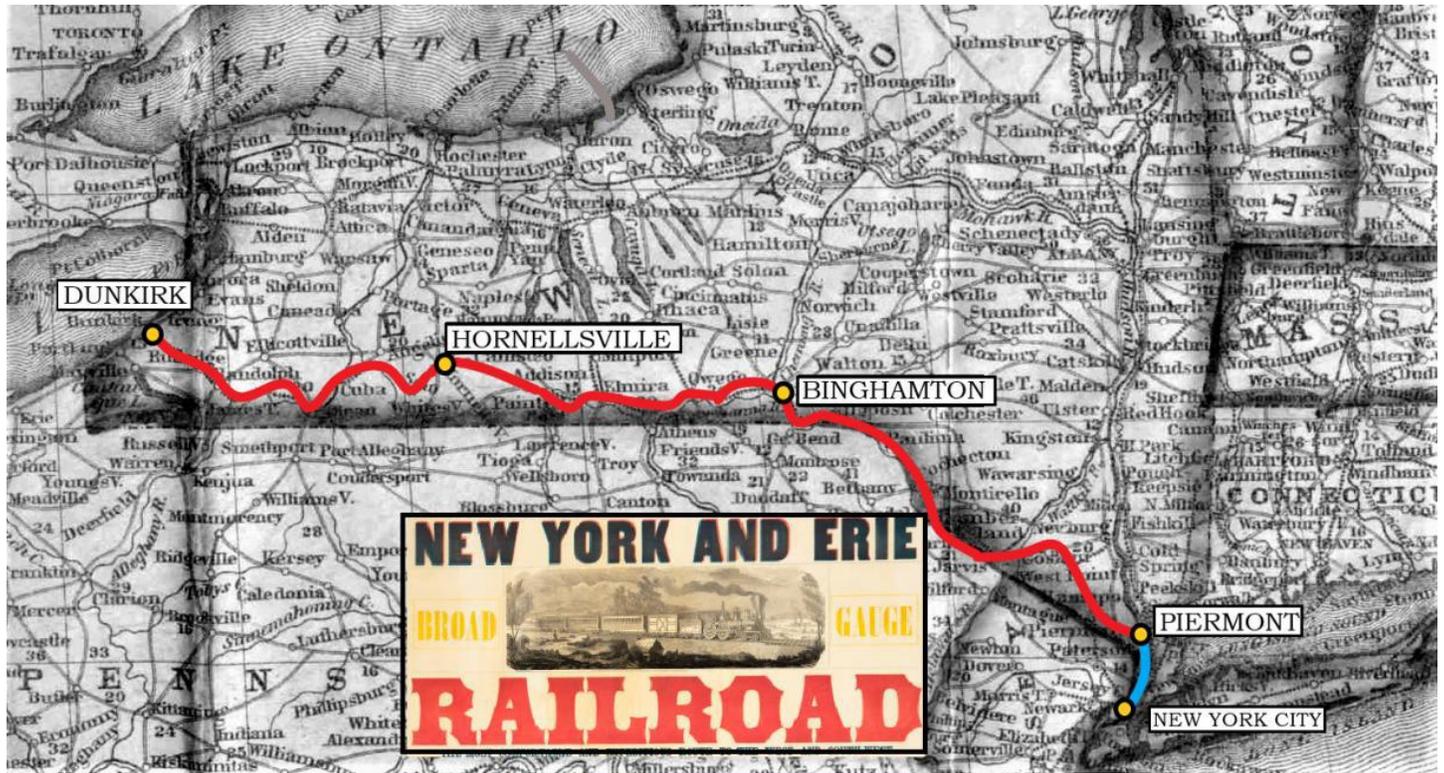
Imagine the afternoon local fighting its way west towards Dunkirk in this snow bound landscape. The train would get through despite the adverse weather.

*Photo: Internet picture downloaded from the historic Erie RR depots web site. This image is probably by J.E. Bailey who documented the Erie's stations around 1906.*

## THE GENESEE RIVER RAILROAD - Part 1

By: Tony Schill

Founded way back in 1832, The Erie was one of the earliest railroads in North America as well as being the first with a mainline stretching hundreds of miles. Construction of its 447-mile route from Piermont, NY to Dunkirk, NY took nearly 20 years, not being completed until 1851.



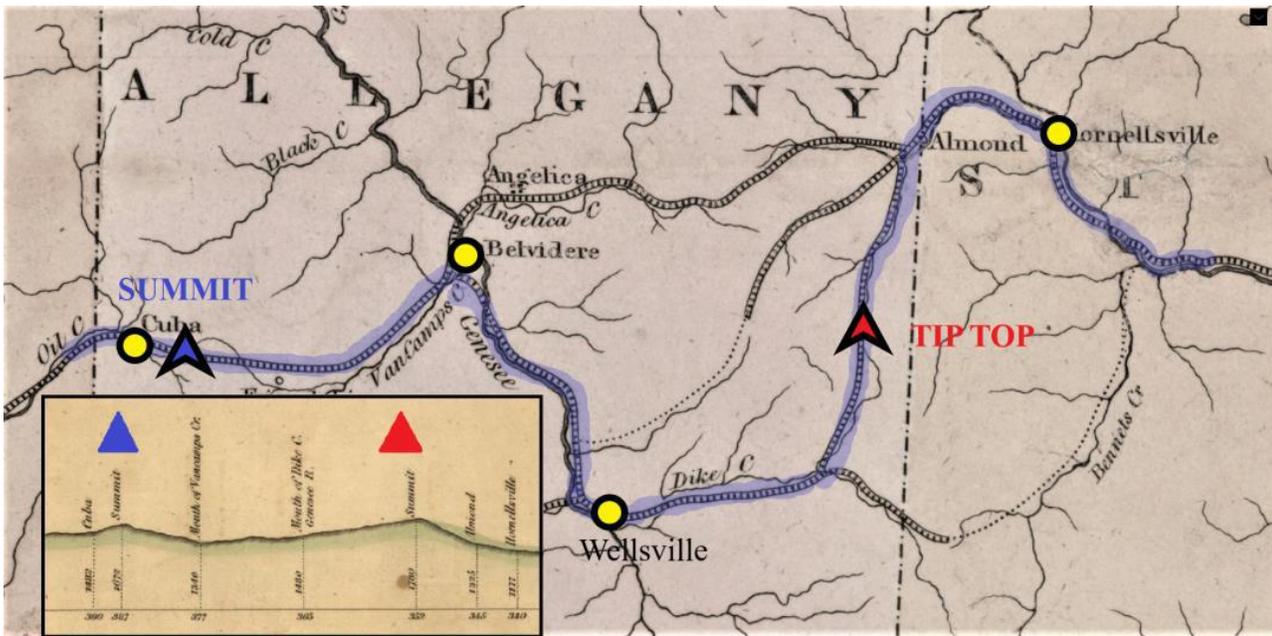
The Erie's first seven decades were difficult. Challenges to its survival were many, and they included gross mismanagement, financial chicanery, and bankruptcy. The Erie's charter from New York State imposed many restrictions in order to protect the Erie Canal interests, not the least of which were the requirements that the line terminate in then-tiny Dunkirk rather than Buffalo, and that it be built to six-foot gauge. Somehow the Erie survived these many troubles, and by 1900 it had become a busy and well-respected major railroad.

As with most railroads constructed by pick, shovel, horse-drawn carts and hand labor in the years before the late-19th century, the Erie line across the very hilly Southern Tier counties of New York was built with fairly steep grades and tight curvature. Such construction was considered both economical and acceptable at the time. In those early days trains were slow, short and relatively light in weight, and no one could then imagine how much that would change by 1900. But change it did, and dramatically so. By 1900 it was clear that the number of steep grades and speed-restricted curves needed to be reduced to eliminate costly helper districts, ease congestion and speed up train movements.

The Erie's Engineering Department identified a number of desirable grade reduction projects in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. One of these projects was between Hornell and Cuba, NY, where the railroad crossed the rather imperceptible ridge separating the watersheds of the Susquehanna and Genesee Rivers. Here was (and is) one of the significant geographic divides in the eastern US; on the eastern side of a point named Tip Top water flows south to the Canisteo River and eventually to the Susquehanna, which empties into Chesapeake Bay. On the western side of Tip Top water flows into the Genesee River north to Lake Ontario, and ultimately into the St. Lawrence River to the ocean.

## THE GENESEE RIVER RR - continued

In those days the Erie was a single track railroad in the Southern Tier. Between Hornell (MP 332, el. 1170) and Cuba (MP 382, el. 1540) there were two high points on the Erie main, one at Tip Top (MP 344, el. 1776), and a second at Summit (MP 377, el. 1695). Generally, there were sustained grades of varying lengths on both sides of both high points of about 1% or just a bit less. These grades slowed traffic and created congestion, a particular problem on a one-track railroad.



A long, sustained 1% grade (one foot up for 100 feet forward, or about 53 feet per mile) is nearly insignificant on a modern highway, but in the steam engine era it was a major problem on a main line railroad. That's because heavy trains (probably all freight trains other than short local way freights) required the added expense of helper assistance (and even then, it would be a slow slog up the hills).

There was no practical way for the Erie to reduce the grade by a simple track realignment; instead, a completely new route was required. Enter the Genesee River Railroad (GRRR).

It was common for railroads to create subsidiary railroads to undertake major new construction projects. Thus on August 21, 1905 the Erie created a subsidiary named the Genesee River Railroad to build a completely new 32.9-mile "low-grade" line between Hunts Station, on the line to Buffalo from Hornell, and a point just west of Cuba on the original main line to be named Cuba Junction. Hunts Station was located a couple miles east of the Erie's famous bridge over the Genesee River at Portageville. A large part of the new line was to mostly parallel the Genesee River, but at a much higher elevation. In addition to a much better route, the new line would create the equivalent of a double-track railroad between Hornell and Cuba Jct. Also, not too far west the Erie was planning to extend an existing section of double track west from Carrollton to Salamanca. Even further west in New York and Pennsylvania more alignment improvements, such as at Niobe, NY, were in the works.

The Genesee River Valley had long been a transportation corridor of considerable importance. The Genesee Valley Canal between Rochester and Olean had opened in 1840, twelve years before the Erie bridged the river at Portageville. The canal prospered for a few years, but then lost much of its business to the ever-expanding railroads. It was abandoned in 1878, and in due course the bed was filled in to create a right of way for the Genesee Valley Canal & Railroad Co. The GVC&R later became the Pennsylvania Railroad's Rochester Branch. It was abandoned in 1963, after the connecting PRR Oil City-Olean line (which was part of the PRR's route from Pittsburgh to Rochester) was severed by construction of the Kinzua Dam.

## THE GENESEE RIVER RR - continued

Finally, for about a decade, 1906-16, the Buffalo & Susquehanna's line from Wellsville to Buffalo passed through the area in the vicinity of Belfast close by both the Erie and PRR.



When the building the Genesee River Railroad commenced in 1906 it was among the largest American railroad construction projects of the early 20th century. When completed in 1910 it provided the Erie with a slightly longer route (by about 6.7 miles) between Hornell and Cuba Jct., but one free of steep grades and slow speeds. In fact, one-way running time for fast freights was reduced by two hours compared to the original route!

Interestingly, a route somewhat similar to that of the GRRR had been surveyed around 1850, before the original main line had been built. Of course, fifty years later it was possible to greatly improve on the 1850-surveyed alignment.

The new railroad had a maximum grade of 0.2% eastbound (the predominate direction of traffic) and 0.3% westbound. Curvature was limited to 3 degrees, but there was only one such curve and three others between 1 degree and 30 minutes and 3 degrees. All other curves were less than 1 degree and 30 minutes. The road was well designed for fast running without helpers. A single locomotive with 80 cars could make good time between Cuba Jct. and Hornell on the GRRR, while on the shorter old main line half as many cars required a pusher to help the road engine.

above: This view of the High Falls of the Genesee River dates from 1875-78 as the Erie's iron bridge was built in 1875 and the Genesee Valley Canal (left, high above the river) was abandoned in 1878.

To be continued in the January 2023 ESX.

## MARKING 100 YEARS FOR OUR STATION

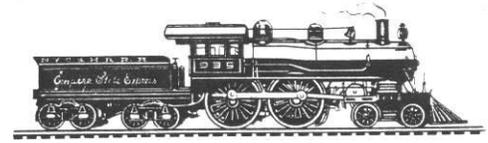


Believe it or not, 111 Oliver Street is turning its 100<sup>th</sup> year now. In celebration of this auspicious event, there will be a special article in the ESX early next year detailing the story behind our Chapter home and railroad museum.

## CHAPTER MEMORIES

Story collected by Geoff Gerstung

### The Railroad Enthusiast – March 1940 issue



#### Jamestown Trip

Sunday, February 11, the Buffalo Division, with a group of 91, operated a “winter cruise” over the Jamestown, Westfield & Northwestern RR, the scenic electric interurban line.

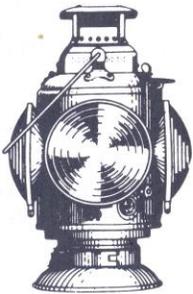
After leaving Buffalo at 11:00 am on New York Central train 81, the group reached Westfield at 12:10 and transferred to the famous No. 312 electric observation car which had been chartered for the day. Soon the car was winding its way up through the snow-covered hills to Chautauqua Lake on the 32-mile run to Jamestown. Stops for photography were made at various points of interest along the line. Late in the afternoon the return to Westfield was made and here NYC train 44 was boarded, arriving in Buffalo at 8:52.

The attendance on this trip far surpassed expectations. Fans from as far as New York City and New England came to make the trip.

The April 5 meeting will be “New York Central Night” with speakers from the NYC. This meeting will be held in the Conference Room of the Central Terminal, and not in the usual place.

Trips – Sunday April 28, out of Oneida, NY to Sidney, NY and return on the New York, Ontario & Western. Sponsored by the Enthusiasts in Syracuse and Buffalo for the benefit of fans in Central New York.

Sunday, May 19, to Detroit on Michigan Central RR. Leave Buffalo 7:47 am Standard Time. Seven hours in Detroit, during which time various engine-houses such as Detroit, Toledo & Ironton and Pere Marquette will be visited. Returning, arrive Buffalo 12:04 am. Special observation coach. Round trip fare \$5.



*Editor’s note: The above lineup of trip opportunities marks a high point in the Buffalo Division’s activities before the U.S. became embroiled in the Second World War. Steam was king on New York Central, the Ontario & Western (or “Old Woman” as she was affectionately known by railfans) was still hauling anthracite, occasional passengers, and milk on its bucolic Northern Division. Detroit engine-houses would have been sheer “heaven” to visit with steam in full vigor. We need a time machine.*

### ON THE TRACK AHEAD – John M. Prophet’s PCC car film & other clips

January will feature digitized film by John M. Prophet, III. John was very interested in PCC cars on electric transit systems, and between 1938 and 1948 he visited nearly twenty US and Canadian cities to record in stunning 16 mm Kodachrome color, a world of vibrant downtowns, modern PCC trolley cars and classic automobiles by the hundreds, a world now vanished. A short bonus steam and early diesel film follows this.

I want to thank all those who over the course of 2022 contributed photos and reading material for publication in the pages of the Empire State Express. I would encourage those of you with favorite rail photos and / or memories of great train rides or of any kind of rail history to write it down and submit it. We always need new material. Have a Safe and Happy Holiday Season. -JCD

## CHAPTER CALENDAR

- DEC 3** Winterwalk in downtown North Tonawanda, Christmas at the Erie RR Station, 10 AM to 4 PM. Operating model train layout, cookies & hot chocolate, visit Santa, Pony rides for kids. <https://www.facebook.com/LumberCityWinterWalk>
- DEC 9** Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center. Open House & Member's Photo Night. Happy Holidays!
- JAN 13** Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center. Program: John M. Prophet's PCC car films from 1938 to 1948, digitized, in stunning Kodachrome color.

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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THANK YOU

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