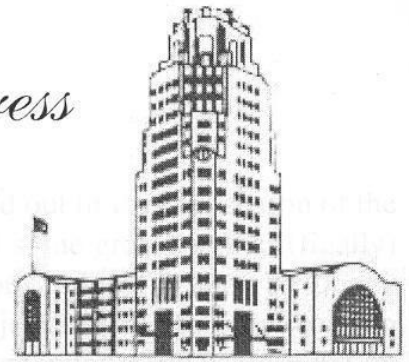


Empire State Express



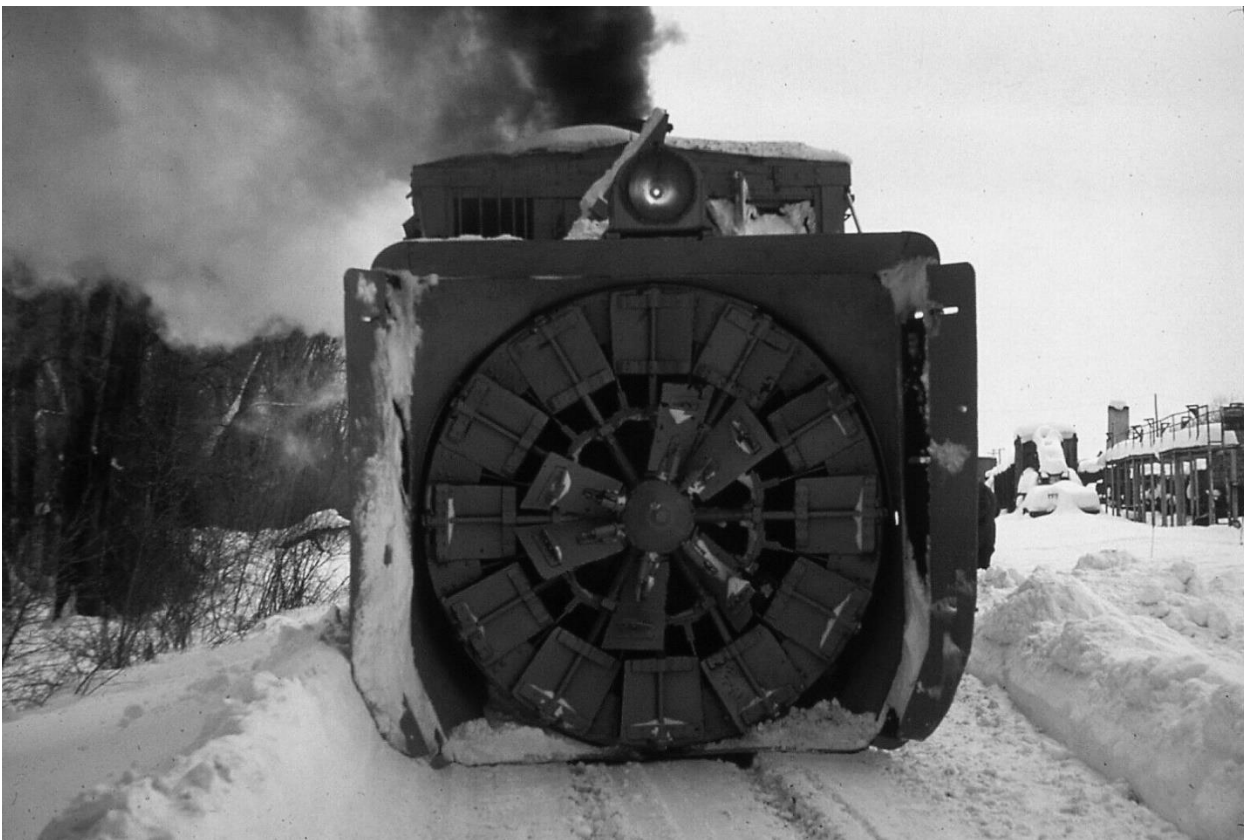
DECEMBER 2023

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 8, 2023 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.

ROTARY ON THE CUMBRES & TOLTEC



The December meeting entertainment will be a DVD featuring the former Denver & Rio Grande RR rotary plow "OY", now on the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad. In May of 1993 this last narrow gauge steam power rotary plow was brought out to clear heavy snow drifts as a railfan special. Come and enjoy this evening of "Snow" presented by Brian Angevine



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

We have experienced some problems in the last two months with the printed ESX being late. Both times the delay, from two different problems, was compounded by there being a Monday holiday (no mail delivery) in the mix. The two problems were rectified, one only to be derailed by the other. We think that we have this under control and we sincerely apologize for the inconvenience. If your ESX is missing or late, let us know!

This year was unique in my experience with our museum. It was a major surprise to receive the Downtown Revitalization Initiative Grant. This allowed us to complete several large projects that we had only been dreaming about, too many to describe here. Along the way, a lot of "someday" projects are getting done. Just this month the transom window over the first east door was restored. That whole room where the Roebling corner stone is located has been painted.

We are about to complete the last phase of the Archive Room Expansion. The HVAC unit is on order and hopefully, it will be installed this year. We are in line for a generous grant from the Niagara County Legislature that will mostly pay for the unit. The final approval will be on the 5th. A major thank you to Rich Andres (8th District Legislator), Randy Gooch (7th district Legislator) and Randy Bradt (9th District Legislator) for their help and support.

During all this construction and disorder, we tried to keep the museum open as best we could. We were averaging a dozen visitors every Saturday during July, August, and September. A great majority of the visitors were understanding and supportive.

We went to the WNYRHS Toy and Train Show on November 18 & 19. We had an extra table and had plenty of stuff to sell. We appreciated all the help gathering and loading the materials that we took to the show and reloading and unloading at the station afterward. A special thanks to Becky and Greg Gerstung for transporting our stuff in their vehicles.

Chapter elections are conducted at the December Meeting per the Chapter bylaws. We need a Recording Secretary as Becky has stepped down from that post after serving for many years. Our status as a 501 (c) 3 corporation requires us to keep minutes of our meetings. The job requires attendance at the regular monthly meetings and the Board meetings. Minutes of these meetings are prepared and distributed to be approved. If you are interested, please let me, or any Board Member, know. The slate of candidates will appear in this issue of the ESX and the election will be held at our December meeting.

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

The Chapter 2024 Calendar is still available. 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. Order by mail, pick them up at the museum, the monthly meeting or at the WNYRHS winter train show (February 17-18). They make a great Holiday Gift!

Wishing you all wonderful Holidays however you celebrate them. Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and Happy New Year from our house to all of you!

Jim Ball

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Photo by Jon Rothenmeyer



Christmas is often about memories. This one is about a special train and a special friend.

South bound at Dayton, NY a New York & Lake Erie Railroad “Santa Claus Express” is approaching the Church Street crossing. *With her bell clanging and air horn shouting out the customary two-longs, a short, and a long blast the train will rumble past us.*

Mother Nature cooperated to get everyone in a festive Christmas mood with just the right amount of a light lake-effect snowfall the night before and clearing, blue skies this Saturday December 7, 2019. The coaches trailing behind a pair of vintage Alco FPA locomotives are filled with kids and their parents, out enjoying a pre-Christmas train ride. It’s not a hyped-up ‘Polar Express’, rather just a good old-fashioned, pure and simple excursion, and I prefer that. Trains and Christmas have long been a good combination, whether it be model trains or the real McCoy. The spirit of Christmas: peace, joy, goodwill, and love are exemplified in this photo of a sun-lit afternoon

The railroad is the former Buffalo & Southwestern branch of the onetime Erie Railroad. Ahead just a few hundred yards is the connection to the original mainline in this tiny hamlet. When the Erie Railroad pushed its tracks west to Dunkirk, NY in 1851, Dayton was a ‘one horse’ town. The B&SW would not be organized by Western New York farmers interested in tapping north to Buffalo and south to Jamestown through the rich agricultural area until some 20 years later. In August 1880, the Erie Railroad leased the B&SW and would absorb it corporately by the end of 1895. Later Erie Lackawanna and Conrail operated the route before spinoff as an independent short line.

THE SPIRIT – continued

At Dayton, a stone underpass, called the ‘Dayton Arch’ was built since the B&SW was lower by about 25 feet in elevation from the Erie main. Although ‘Dayton Arch’ appears to be its official name, all the local folk refer to it as the ‘Dayton tunnel’ to this day. The Erie right of way came into town on the edge of the Conewango plateau and a high fill was needed to carry the tracks across the large gully formed by Thatcher Brook. B&SW’s tracks followed this waterway from Gowanda, twisting and climbing up the steep 2.5% grade of Dayton Hill. The two lines crossed on a naturally grade separated arrangement. The stone workmanship of the arch is still magnificent to view and ponder how it could have been built with essentially only manpower and that of horses. Its massive stone blocks must have been quarried nearby.

In the photo, the train is just cresting the steep grade and soon it will be coasting along level ground through woods and pastures, all resting under a pristine white blanket of snow. *Her whistle shouts again for there are two more road crossings in Dayton and we can hear the sound echoing in the cold, still air. We enjoy the characteristic ‘Alco chugging’ of the diesels.* The tiny crossroads of Markhams will be passed next as the train swings due south on a broad curve to its scheduled station stop at South Dayton.

With three more road crossings, two of which are mere country lanes, the Alco’s will shout out again, and again, and again. The slumbering farms and solitary houses which dot the landscape hear that shout as do we. With the train’s passage, a wintry but quiet peace returns.

The local folks in South Dayton are waiting in anticipation for the train with a mini farmer and crafts-persons market at the train station. Homemade baked pies, bread, jams, pickles, jellies, and candy will be for sale to the excursionists. The railroad crew will be kept busy too, running the locomotives around the train during the brief stop. Santa has stepped down from a coach and is strolling around the market and village green opposite the one-hundred-year-old train depot, posing for photo ops with toddlers and adults too. An interlude of normal traffic returns to the town. A few cars dart across the Pine Street crossing and the clip-clop of horses on an Amish buggy heading home is heard. It’s December; the sun is getting lower quickly on the western horizon.

Before long the conductor announces, ‘All Aboard’! Last-minute purchases are concluded and the holiday travelers scramble back to the station to reboard their coach. The conductor swings aboard and the dutch-door of the coach slams shut. The locomotive bell sounds, and the horn calls out for the Maple Street crossing next to the Harry Austin Mill. With a dusting of ‘Alco smoke’ belching skyward and a rumble from the diesels, flanges squeal and rails groan under the train’s weight. Slowly the clanking of couplers, engaging again, confirms the train is moving and accelerating. Northbound, the special is heading back along this old bit of historic railroad. Kids and adults alike enjoy another moment to savor the splendor of a winter rural landscape as twilight takes hold. A Christmas memory has been created again.

That Spirit of Christmas Past returns to me as I write this column and I study Jon’s now precious photograph made four years ago. I was privileged to be there with my friend Jon on that day when a train, snow, sunshine, and Christmas Spirit came alive on the New York & Lake Erie Railroad.

Merry Christmas!

JCD



ELECTION OF CHAPTER OFFICERS – CANDIDATES FOR 2024

Name	Office
James V. Ball	President
Gregory G. Gerstung	Vice President
Vacant	Second Vice President
Bruce Becker	Treasurer
Vacant	Recording Secretary
Nancy Andrycha	Corresponding 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

The election will be held at the December 8, 2023 meeting. Nominations from the floor can be made for all offices. **Note we have vacancies needing to be filled.**

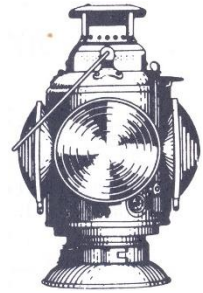
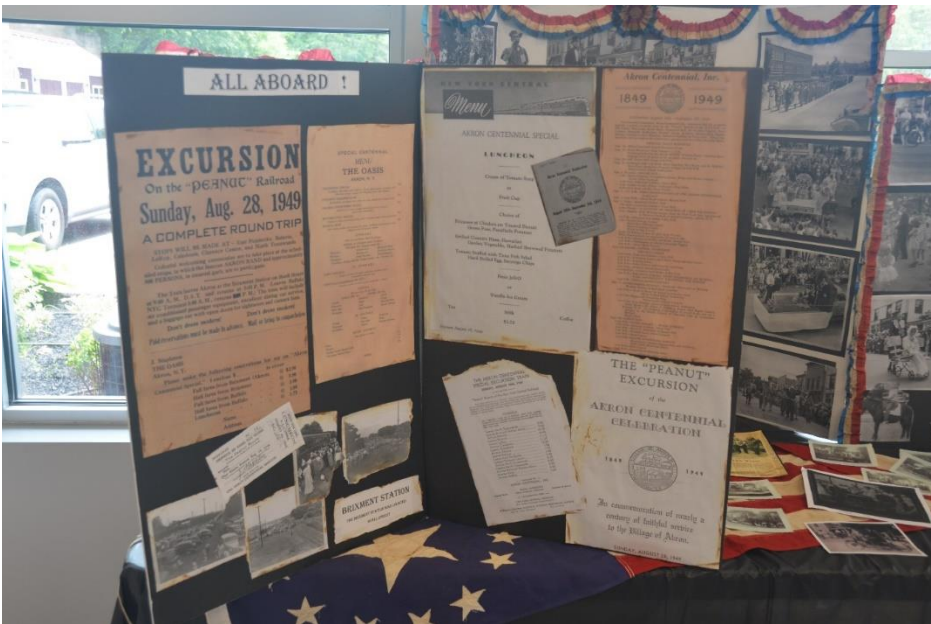
SCENE ON THE LINE



Near the 1958-built Massachusetts Ave. water pumping station, Amtrak train 64 is heading for the downtown Buffalo stop at the Exchange Street station. August 15, 2023. How this location has changed! Years ago, the now late Charlie Erler photographed New York Central Hudson's hauling standard coaches on trains from Niagara Falls near this same spot! Interstate 190 did not exist along the Niagara River and the Belt Line / Niagara Branch was still double track. Trains were a lot more plentiful too and many still with steam power.
Larry Gustina photo.

CONGRATULATIONS, BOB and BOB!

An article in the Akron, NY Bugle of September 28, 2023 relates that Niagara Frontier Chapter, NRHS Director Bob Andrycha has been appointed as an assistant Town Historian in his new adopted home of Newstead, NY. Bob along with our long-time member and Akron resident Bob Scheib, collaborated on the Town's Bicentennial exhibit this past summer at the public library in Akron. It very prominently featured numerous photos and artifacts from the New York Central's West Shore line and the long gone "Peanut" (Batavia branch). Both traversed Newstead. The tracks crossed each other on a diamond called Akron Junction west of the village of Akron. Portions of both former rail lines have been made into hiking and biking rail trails in recent years. Both gentlemen did extensive research to tell the story of these once upon a time railroads. We congratulate them both and wish Bob A. well in his new assignment with the Town of Newstead. – JCD



SANTA TRAINS ON THE NEW YORK & LAKE ERIE



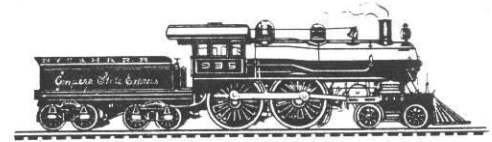
A full schedule of Santa Claus specials will operate this December on the New York & Lake Erie out of Gowanda, NY on the following weekends: December 2 & 3, 9 & 10, and 16 & 17. Train times are 11 AM, 1 PM, and 3 PM. Tickets can be purchased online at www.nylerailroad.com

Mr. and Mrs. Claus pose with Alco FPA4 6758. Winter is a great time on the railroad, particularly near the Holidays! December 7, 2019. JCD

CHAPTER MEMORIES

Story collected by Geoff Gerstung

The Railroad Enthusiast – January-February 1941 issue



Sayre Trip

On the morning of October 6, [1940], a group of 253 people boarded a 5-car special train at Rochester on the Lehigh Valley RR for a scenic autumn-leaf and shop inspection trip to Sayre, PA. The train, consisting of four LV coaches and a large Reading baggage car with wide doors, proceeded over the Rochester Branch and thence over the Main Line all the way to Sayre, including the section along Seneca Lake from Geneva Jct. to Van Etten Jct. over which no regular passenger trains operate in daylight. Sayre was reached shortly after noon, and, after watching the eastbound streamlined Black Diamond which passed a few minutes later, the group assembled at a nearby hotel for dinner.

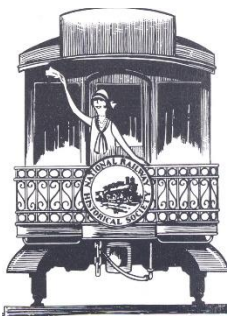
Special guides conducted the fans on an interesting tour of the large Lehigh Valley enginehouse and locomotive and car shops. Various types of locomotives were lined up in the yards for inspection and photography.

In the middle of the afternoon the special was loaded up, and the return journey began, this time via the scenic Ithaca Branch along Cayuga Lake where a stop was made at Taughannock Falls, the highest fall east of the Rocky Mountains.

The arrival back in Rochester early in the evening concluded the largest rail-fan trip ever operated from western and central New York. It was jointly sponsored by the Buffalo and Central New York Divisions of the Enthusiasts and the Rochester Chapter of the NRHS. The groups from Buffalo and Syracuse travelled to and from Rochester in extra coaches on N.Y.C. trains.

Jamestown Trip

Although the Sayre trip in October [1940] had been planned as the last trip of the year, the insistent inquiries of the “juice” fans prompted the running of another excursion over the interurban electric Jamestown, Westfield & Northwestern RR. So, on November 17 a group of 57 made the run on this 32-mile, scenic line in the chartered observation car. It turned out to be the first winter trip of the season as the ground was covered with snow, and snow fell most of the day. But, wet as the snow was, it didn’t dampen the enthusiasm for this old favorite of juice lines.



ON THE TRACK AHEAD

January’s program will be courtesy of Mark Klingel, a U.S. Coast Guardsman currently stationed in Buffalo who is also a railfan and an excellent photographer. Mark will show us some contemporary western New York railroading, and will explore changes in railroads that have been happening here and nearby in recent years. Join us for a fresh perspective on railroading in our own backyard!

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

- DEC 8** **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. Brian Angevine presents a look at winter snow fighting on the Cumbres & Toltec railroad.**

- JAN 12** **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. Mark Klingel takes a look at contemporary railroading in western New York.**

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 us know by sending it to nfcnrhs@gmail.com THANK YOU

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