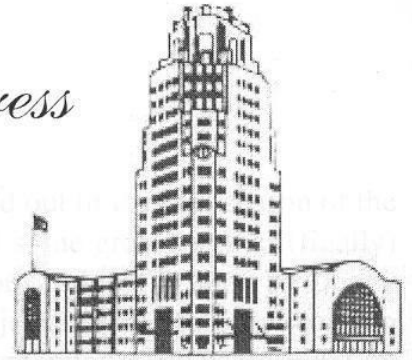


Empire State Express



APRIL 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, April 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.

RAILROADS IN THE BUFFALO BLIZZARD OF 1977



On February 6, 1977 Conrail at Cabin "B" on the Niagara Branch in downtown Buffalo, NY sees former NYCRR / Penn Central (originally Rome, Watertown & Ogdensburg RR) 1891 rotary snowplow #60021 clearing the tracks alongside I-190 after the infamous Blizzard of '77. Join us as retired railroader Devan Lawton recalls the railroad related events of this epic once in a century storm. Photo by Devan Lawton.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



We are working almost every Saturday at the Museum even when there is that white stuff on the ground. We can get in now as we have a local service that will plow out the parking lot if needed. Most Saturdays we have had visitors. We now publish that the Museum is open the first Saturday of the month through the winter and spring. This brings visitors to us who are looking for something to do on the weekend before the “festival season” begins.

The Museum Project, as we call it, is the dream of turning an abandoned freight house into the Railroad Museum of the Niagara Frontier. “A Railroad Museum in a Parklike Setting”. It’s an ongoing process of thousands of individual steps to get there. It has been going on since we bought the property in 1986. I keep a lot of records on what is done there. I have been doing this from the beginning, and in a lot more detail since 2014 or so. When I was preparing my remarks for the Banquet, the Year in Review section was quite a list. I went through it three times to make sure that I didn’t miss anything.

I am happy to report that the arrangements for the Chapter Banquet, held Saturday March 23rd worked out very well. In fact, it was a huge success. We were in a new location, a very nice room in the Social Hall of Amherst Unitarian Universalist church. The meal was wonderful thanks to Chef Bruce and the staff of Clear Block Catering. The program was beyond excellent. The lost Films of John Prophet, as presented by Aaron Heverin. Aaron does a masterful job of digitizing the films. Beyond that he sets them into the context of who John Prophet was and of the times that he lived in. The raffles were handled smoothly and there were lots of prizes. We also had donation from John Freyseng of a framed newspaper article. It covered the last run of the Niagara St. Catherines & Toronto trolley line. It is a line that the Chapter made many trips on. Plans are being formulated to march in the North Tonawanda Dyngus Day Parade. The parade will be on Monday April 1st. Hopefully you will be reading this by then. We are also looking at being in the Canal Fest parade with a float.

Coming up very soon will be our Chiavetta’s Chicken BBQ. The date is May 11, the day after the May meeting. If you can help, please let us know. Come get some, bring the family and friends. Tasty, tasty, you know you want some!!

Once again the Calendar Committee is accepting images for consideration. The 2025 Chapter Calendar should be for sale at the September meeting.

There are plans coming together to do more trackwork on the Museum grounds over the summer. We have acquired over two hundred ties. That sounds like a lot but it really isn’t when we talk about replacing each and every one. Speaking of summer work, there will be some painting to do if that is more your speed.

Training for tour guides is also available on demand. There is an opening on the Board of Directors for Recording Secretary and while not a Board position, for Program Coordinator. The Summer Tourist Season will be here before we know it. We are always looking for tour guides. Saturdays from 11 am until 4 pm, training provided. See you at the Meeting, or at the Museum.

Jim Ball

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE BUFFALO CHAPTER, NRHS

From the Utica Observer-Dispatch, June 23, 1946

They Love Everything About It

By DAVID H. BEETLE

If you are the kind of person who walks through car after car looking for a reclining seat coach and then grumbles if the train stops at any city under 100,000, you'll never understand the 60-odd passengers who went from Oneida to Sidney and back on the Ontario & Western last Sunday.

These folks (they're railroad fans) head for the oldest open-platformed, acetylene-lighted, wooden-framed coaches they can find. They prefer them dangling on the end of a combined freight-and-passenger train that not only stops at every crossroads but pauses long enough to drop off or take on cars.

And as for air-conditioning, they throw open the windows, sit back on the red plush seats with cinders blowing in around them and say "Boy, isn't this wonderful!"

Under these terms, the O&W, which wanders across the hilly Southern Tier landscape toting hard coal (when it can get it), unloading feed, and picking up milk is just about tops. The "fans" love its gorgeous scenery, its high-flung trestles, its horseshoe curves, its steep grades, its jouncing road-bed, its creaking coaches, its puffy little 10-wheeler locomotives, its anachronistic diesels - and its quaint old receivership.

Last Sunday's trip was their fifth over the Oneida-Sidney end of the line in the last 10 years. It was the first big trek since the war, but followed numerous pre-war "successes" including a 24-mile trip in a gondola car from Arcade to Attica, a special tour on a Canadian road so little used that they found a cow hitched to the rails ("But there are never any trains through here Sundays," exclaimed the farmer), and a memorable visit to Coudersport, Pa., where they were met by a brass band.

Officially Sunday's event was sponsored by the Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse chapters of the National Railway Historical Society. Utica's Model railroad club helped. A few "unattached fans" went along.

It was a good full day. Buffalo folk (weighed down with sandwiches, cameras and extra film) had to get up at 4:30 a.m. to catch the *Lake Shore Limited*, which had made a special stop at Oneida about 10 to let them off. From there, the puffy, single-track O&W took over, carted them on a swaying 1890-ish coach 68 miles to Sidney and back, and unloaded them in Oneida about 9, or in plenty of time for a train which would land them back in Buffalo by 2:30 a.m.

One of the finest trips we've ever had," beamed Russell H. Shapley Buffalo chapter head and national vice president. "Well it's sure nice to have someone interested in us," agreed the O&W train crew, bewildered - but delighted. "These people are crazy," mumbled Observer-Dispatch photographer Dante Tranquille, wearily slinging his camera in the back of his car. At times there was something to be said for Tranquille's (the layman's) point of view.

Railroad fans are not like any other passengers you've seen - or heard about. They stand in the vestibules, sit on the car steps, loll out the baggage car door, stick their heads (and camera lenses) out the windows, hop off and on at every stop, climb into the locomotive (sometimes it looked as though the engineer had to reach past three fans to touch the throttle), and relax only to read timetables, change film, or pass around potato salad.

"Look - there's D&H No. 1526," yelled Shapley once when things seemed to be quieting down. Instantly, every one on the far side of the car was on his feet and across the aisle. The whole trip was made in a state of breathless expectancy.

At Lyon Brook Bridge - the O&W's iron-girdered, 820-foot-long showpiece - the engineer stopped after going across, let out the fans (camera-loaded to the hilt), and then obligingly backed over and came across again for pictures.

"Just imagine getting the New York Central to do that for you!" exclaimed one of the fans. "No wonder we love the O&W." And, incidentally, the fact that the fan's special car took them over a "freight only" division since 1944 added to the occasions luster.

ONCE UPON A TIME – continued

At Sherburne Four Corners, fans turned out for the “flying milk car” trick - the O&W equivalent of the Wallenda act. The engine takes one car, speeds forward, drops the car, and spurts straight up the mainline. Meanwhile, a nimble trainman, taking advantage of the space between the spurting engine and the coasting milk car, throws a switch, and the car slides onto a siding, ready for the next day’s milk.

An unscheduled bit of excitement came at Munnsville, when the conductor noticed that the roof of a livestock car (apparently kindled by sparks from the locomotive) was burning briskly. All hands doused it with a milk station hose. Later - coming back - the platform of the caboose (really, a combined plush-seater and baggage car) caught fire, but the crew sponged it out with waste rags and a waste basin.

“These fires aren’t bad in the daytime when you can spot ‘em quickly, It’s at night that they’re tough,” said a trainman laconically, giving a smoldering bit of wood an extra dash.

At Norwich the “fans” streamed through the roundhouse, tried pushing the turntable, and gazed on a wrecked “Mother Hubbard” - an anthracite-burning locomotive with such a big fire box that the engineer has been crowded out of the regular cab and into a new “cupboard” up front.

Who are the fans? Well, one way to find out would be to walk up and down the car and ask them.

To begin with there’s Shapley - and boy is he “at home” on the O&W! His father and Harlow Shapley, Harvard’s world-famed astronomer, went to the same little stone schoolhouse at Randallsville. “Two or three of my ancestors are buried right over in that cemetery,” he told his wife as the train sped homeward toward Eaton.

A youngster of 10, he got his first locomotive ride around the Randallsville yards when an engineer invited him to climb in. Years later, when his 16-year-old son (also a “fan”) had the same experience, it was with a different engineer, but on the same line and in the same locomotive. Barring accidents, O&W rolling stock turns over slowly.

Now a clerk in the Buffalo Consolidated Railway ticket office, Shapley Sr., was a department store credit manager when he helped to organize the Buffalo group in 1937. On Sunday’s trip, busier than the engineer, he was passing out brochures, offering membership applications. (There’s a potential member, only we haven’t got him yet,” said Shapley when he saw a farmer watching the train go by, drumming up business for the 90-mile Dunkirk-Titusville trip on the *Dolly Varden*, and supplying information on the O&W.

“This last included the rather startling news to a layman that in a 1906 timetable the O&W - cooperating with other lines - described itself as “the only railroad providing reclining-seat car-seats free from New York to Chicago.”

Across the aisle, from Shapley (or from where he hung his coat), in a blue-denim engineer’s suit with red bandanna, visored cap, and goggles, sat James Tarbell, sewage plant mechanic from Jackson, Michigan. “This is the way to dress for railroading,” he said, annoyed slightly by the fact that the other fans hadn’t showed up in costume. He’d reserved his for the O&W, incidentally, having set it out the night before from Michigan on the *Wolverine*, looking as trim as a clothing buyer.

Tarbell, who has 8,000 locomotive pictures at home as well as 5,000 feet of personally-taken movies of narrow gauge lines, had returned recently from 10 days of narrow-gauging in Colorado. Some years ago, in flood-stricken Ohio, he had heard about the *Lakeshore Limited* wreck at Little Falls, jumped into his car, and detoured to West Virginia before finding a road through to the Mohawk Valley. Happily he arrived in time to get pictures.

The Syracuse spokesman was a trim, youthful, neatly dressed (at the start anyway) civil engineer, J. R. McFarlane, ex-Navy lieutenant. Given crisp, new discharge papers in Los Angeles, he rushed back to Central New York by way of two-dozen steam and interurban lines. The trip (with stop-overs to catch his breath) took a month. In all, he covered 6,400 miles - nearly 900 of it by electric train or trolley.

Also from Syracuse was the biggest family group, Mr. and Mrs. James B. McKenney, and three children: Margaret, 9, Kathleen, 5, and James Jr., 3 - the last just big enough to crawl up the steps of a day coach without help. Central New York Power’s assistant budget supervisor, McKenney is the son of a railroad conductor who lost his life when he fell between cars on the DL&W near Unadilla Forks. His mother, Mrs. Pauline McKenney, lives at 1138 Linwood, and his brother is a Utica police sergeant.

ONCE UPON A TIME – continued



“Riding on the locomotive was best,” said Margaret, although Kathleen was scared by the blast of heat when the fireman stoked up.

Partly “in costume” (he wore a railroader’s hat and canvas gloves) was Colgate Economics Professor William C. Kessler. With him were his son, Dietrich; a fellow professor, Richard Behrendt; and two Colgate students, John Moore and Wallace Higgins, Westfield, N. J.

Professor Kessler, interested in the “economics” of the O&W as well as in its choo-choos and scenery, observed that the line was built in the 1870s by some men who looked at a map (evidently not a “relief map”) and figured the other railroads were wasting their time going along the Mohawk and down the Hudson to New York when you could cut straight across from Oswego to Weehawken. So they did.

But - as Colgate’s economist sees it - hauling freight up and down hills, building tunnels and trestles, and avoiding all cities of any size proved unprofitable. In five years the road was bankrupt. A branch anthracite line from Hancock to Scranton pulled it out. A growing Catskill tourist trade helped, too, but in the 1930 depression, the road slumped again, went into receivership, and laid off passenger service right and left while little villages with big chambers of commerce wailed. Today with economical diesels, appeals for loyalty, and door-delivery freight service, it is trying to get out of the red.

From Utica came four model train enthusiasts (Robert Gurley, Gene MaFarland, Hobart Price and Henry Welch) and a guest, Francis Vaughn.

Add to the list: Half-dozen wives, one fan’s fiancé (daughter of an airplane pilot, by the way), three or four youngsters, a state motor vehicle inspector who got interested in trains watching them go across a trestle at Liberty; the Buffalo Courier Express librarian, two Curtis-Wright employees, an ex-meter reader, a high school student, and four Taylor Instrument workers, and you begin to know who the “fans” are.

It’s 185,000 quarts of milk having been sent speeding on to Weehawken the train started back with 18 cars (most of them empty milk takers) which dwindled to two as it ambled toward Oneida.

One of the “guests” - a young lady - fell asleep. Two or three of the association members (probably recent “joiners”) nodded a bit.

A fan rallied sufficiently to grab up a bucket and put on an act: “Get your ice cold drinks here now folks. Get them now. No service after the train leaves the station. Get your ice cold . . .”

The fireman at last managed to find room enough in the cab to shovel coal. The conductor offered the McKenney youngsters some cake from his lunch box, lit a kerosene lamp, and bent over his reports. Mr. and Ms. Shapley came in off the back platform.

Mrs. Kessler met the Colgate party with a car at Randallsville, sparing them the last few jounces. One of the Taylor Instrument men wiped a smudge from his forehead. Tarbell changed into his *Wolverine* clothes. And finally, at Oneida, everyone stumbled out -calling cheerily to one another, “See you on the *Dolly Varden*.”

Then only was the trip marred. There wasn’t any train west for hours, and the Syracusans sped home in - of all things - a New York State Railways chartered bus!

Next year the group hopes to operate an even better trip. The route: Utica to Clinton to Rome, then back to Clinton and on to Randallsville and Sidney, returning to Oneida.

Editor note: copies of the above story are apparently circulating among several railfans. I would like to thank Becky Gerstung, Peter Gores, and Richard Palmer specifically for sending copies to ESX.

ON THE TRACK AHEAD



May's program will take an in depth look at **LCL – Less Than Carload** – a business in which the railroads excelled at managing before truck motor transport captured the market. Tony Schill will take us into the inner workings of this once important service in which just about anything and everything could be and was handled in small quantities.

CHICKEN BBQ IS MAY 11

The Chapter annual fund raiser Chiavetta Chicken BBQ will be held Saturday May 11th. Dinners will be ready starting at 11:30 AM, Drive In, Take Out Only. Please support this fund raising effort for the Museum.



AT THE MARCH MEETING

Chapter Treasurer Bruce Becker shows us a circa 1920 “Magic Lantern” used to project glass slide photos onto a screen at the meeting program last month. While the bulk of the show pictures was provided as modern digital copies, we also learned how the technology of 100 years ago would have been used. The remarkable views of safety issues on the Milwaukee Railroad were fascinating. Thanks Bruce for a great program!

LAST RUN



In Memoriam – Richard E. Baldwin

Long time Chapter member Richard E. Baldwin passed away on March 9, 2024 at the age of 89 under hospice care in Attica, NY after a period of declining health. A lengthy article in The Buffalo News of March 22, 2024 details his storied long-time career as a newspaper reporter and editor. A Syracuse, NY native, he started in the

newspaper business initially after graduating from Syracuse University at the Post-Standard, but soon moved to Oneida working for the Oneida Dispatch, and began a career in 1957 with the Buffalo Courier Express and then later The Buffalo News. “Dick” was also a lifelong railroad enthusiast and had been editor of this publication, the *Empire State Express*, from 1978 thru June of 2007 for a remarkable nearly 30 year run, making him one of the longest serving members of the Chapter’s board of directors. His professional skills were put to good use in the pages of the ESX and were much appreciated by all of the membership. In the January 2024 ESX, a reprint of an article Dick had authored in the mid 1970’s regarding Buffalo’s trolley and interurban rail systems appeared. Your current editor discussed this with Dick beforehand at the December meeting and he was pleased and thrilled that it would appear again in print.

The Buffalo News article also details that Dick had the “distinction of being the last paying passenger on the Ontario & Western Railroad in the 1950’s, taking the round trip from Oneida to Fulton and back.” The O&W (New York, Ontario & Western) or “Old Woman” as railfans nicknamed her, was totally abandoned in March 1957 but its heritage is still revered today among railroad historians. (Our Chapter indeed had some memorable excursions over the O&W in years gone by. See page 3 of this ESX for the story of one trip in 1946).

In addition to his news career, Dick was very involved in his church, serving in recent years on the Parish Council at SS. Columba-Brigid Catholic Church in Buffalo, in the “Peaceprints” program headed by the now late Sister Karen Klimczak, and in other volunteer capacities. Survivors include two daughters, a son, a sister, his longtime companion, Margaret “Peggy” Wolf and five grandchildren. Arrangements for a memorial service are incomplete as of March 22. The Chapter extends its sincere condolences to all of Dick’s family.

JCD

Above: An O&W excursion at Oneida, NY. Wm F. Helmer photo, not dated. However, this photo may indeed be from the June 1946 trip described starting on page 3.

CHAPTER CALENDAR

- APR 12** Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. “The Railroads in the Buffalo Blizzard of 1977” plus some surprise movies! Program by Devan Lawton.
- MAY 10** Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. Program by Tony Schill, Less Than Carload.
- MAY 11** **CHIAVETA CHICKEN BBQ FUNDRAISER** at the Station. Dinners ready 11:30 AM. Drive in, Take Out only. Please help support this important fundraising effort.

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 nfcrhs@gmail.com THANK YOU

The Empire State Express is mailed free to all members of the Niagara Frontier Chapter NRHS, Inc. Anyone who is not a Chapter / NRHS member may receive *The Empire State Express* by mail. Please contact the Chapter at PO Box 1043, North Tonawanda, NY 14120 for current membership and subscription rate details.



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED DATED MATERIAL – PLEASE EXPEDITE

The Empire State Express
 NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER NRHS, INC.
 POST OFFICE BOX 1043
 NORTH TONAWANDA, NY 14120