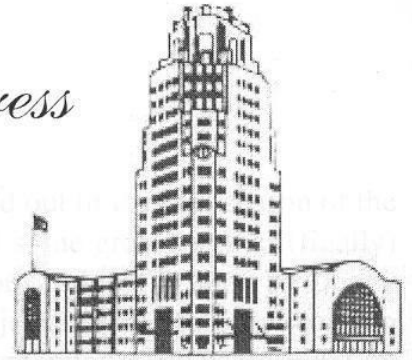


Empire State Express



JANUARY 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, January 13, 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.

THE PCC CAR. A film by JOHN M. PROPHET



A Riverside car in Boston, Massachusetts on a snowy, bright day in 1970 is coming to the station stop. Portrait by Walter Simpson. Please turn to page 7 for more PCC history and photos.

The Presidents Conference Committee streetcar was a design first built in the 1930s. John Prophet took a liking to this modern form of transportation and from 1938 to 1948 (with a timeout for WWII) filmed PCCs in stunning 16 mm Kodachrome color (now digitized) in more than a dozen major cities. John captured more than just trolley cars. The urban landscapes show a vibrant world of American and Canadian city street scenes more than eight decades ago.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



I was all set to begin this month's column talking about beginning a new year. I was going to say that we take down our Chapter Calendar and hang up the new one. We begin by looking back at what we accomplished in 2022.

Wait! No, not this time. Stop the train! The unprecedented news that we received on the 15th of December, that the State of New York has awarded a Ten Million Dollar DRI grant to North Tonawanda, was stunning. Our share of that will be \$470,000. Wow. I'm still trying to process that. We will, of course, keep all of you updated on the progress of the process as we go. We will put together a big picture description of the work that the grant will finance in the coming months. This will bring the Museum infrastructure light years into the future.

In other news, we have changed the company that prints the ESX. This issue (January) will be the first from the new printer. For those of you who receive your ESX via the USPS, please report any problems so that we can get them rectified immediately.

In further news, the Chapter has been offered the 25 ton G. E. switch engine from ADM Milling. The unit was built in July of 1955 for Standard Milling Co. It wears orange paint and is lettered "Standard Elevator No. 1. It served the mill on St Clair St. for many years and was later moved to Ganson St. We are working on how to get it moved.

Winterwalk was Saturday December 3rd. The deadline line for this column last month was before the event happened. The Museum was open at 11am with the usual yule tide decorations and now traditional hot chocolate and cookies. The pony rides were out front. This provided Santa Claus with a chance to show off his horsemanship. Who knew that the dude could ride?

Thanks to Becky, Greg, Bob and Nancy, Ben Hiltz, Randy Bugucki, John Dahl, and Steve and Karen Frey for getting the Museum ready. Thanks to those same people for being on hand for the event. A special thanks to Bruce Becker for portraying the jolly Man from the North Pole in the red suit. We estimated that we had nearly one hundred visitors that day.

Neal reports that membership renewals are coming in at a good pace. If you have not sent in yours yet, please do so right away. If you include a donation with that, please be as generous as you can. The management of the Museum is very careful with spending money to get the most value from it. You all know from firsthand experience that a dollar doesn't buy much anymore.

The WNYRHS February Train Show is scheduled for the weekend of the 18th and 19th. Since the November show was cancelled due all that white stuff, we are eagerly looking forward to this one.

Finally, a big thankyou to all the Officers and Directors and the Committee members who make this organization work. From publishing the Empire State Express to keeping track of all the records, minding the Museum building and tending the Archives and the Library, it all gets done. We have a fine record of Preservation, Restoration and Interpretation thanks to all of you. Some milestones for 2023: the station is 100 years old and the Museum will have been open for twenty years come April!

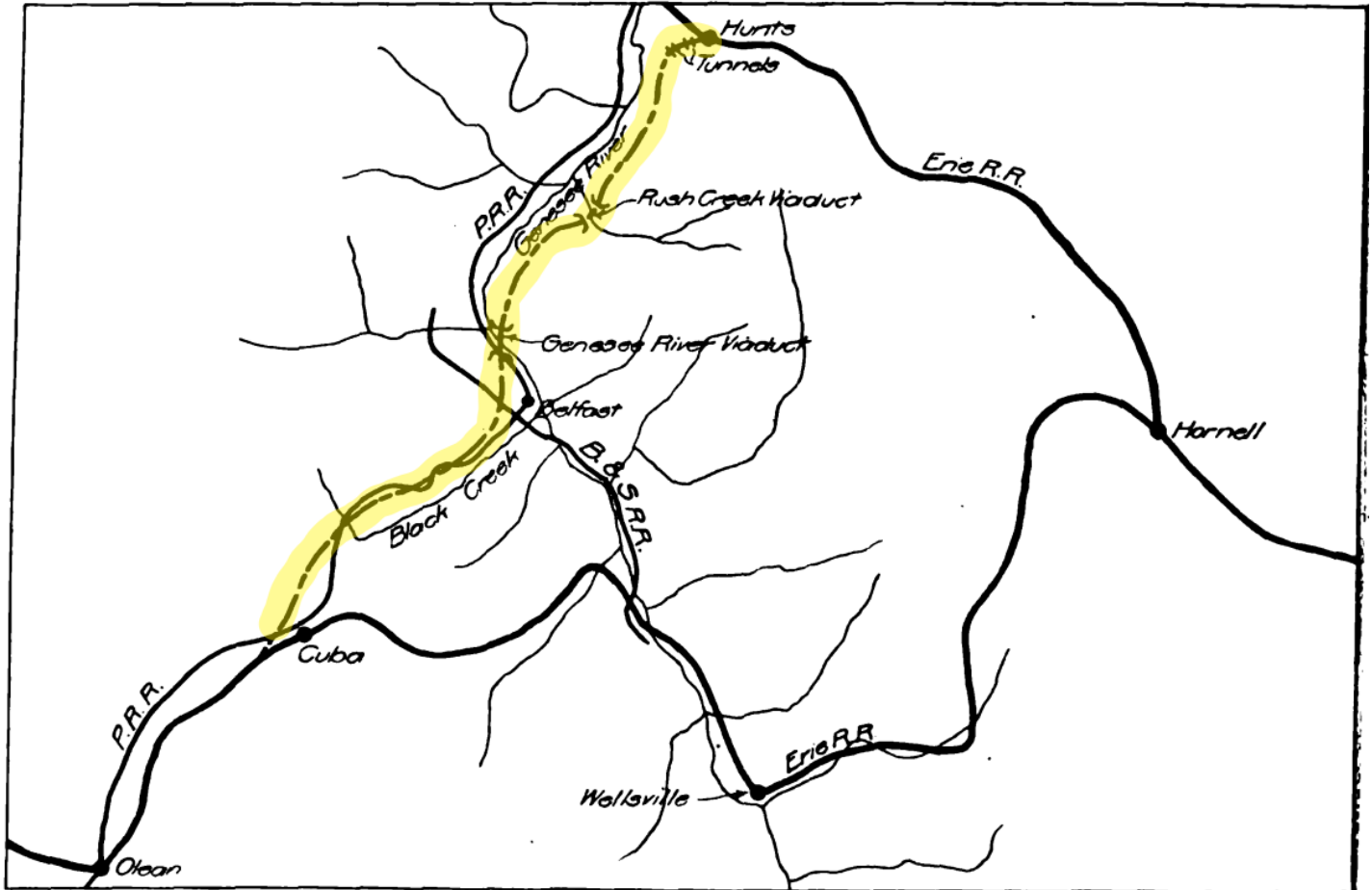
Happy New Year Everyone! See you at the meeting?

Jim Ball

THE GENESEE RIVER RAILROAD - Part 2

By: Tony Schill

As originally planned, the Genesee River Railroad) included two tunnels at the north end having a combined length of 2,200 feet, and two immense bridges each well over 120' in height. Of course, there were also smaller bridges, large culverts and frequent cuts and fills of significant size. All of this was accomplished by using the most modern construction machinery available, such as "railroad" steam shovels (which ran on tracks), steam powered excavators, etc.—a far cry from the pick and shovel methods of 70 years earlier.



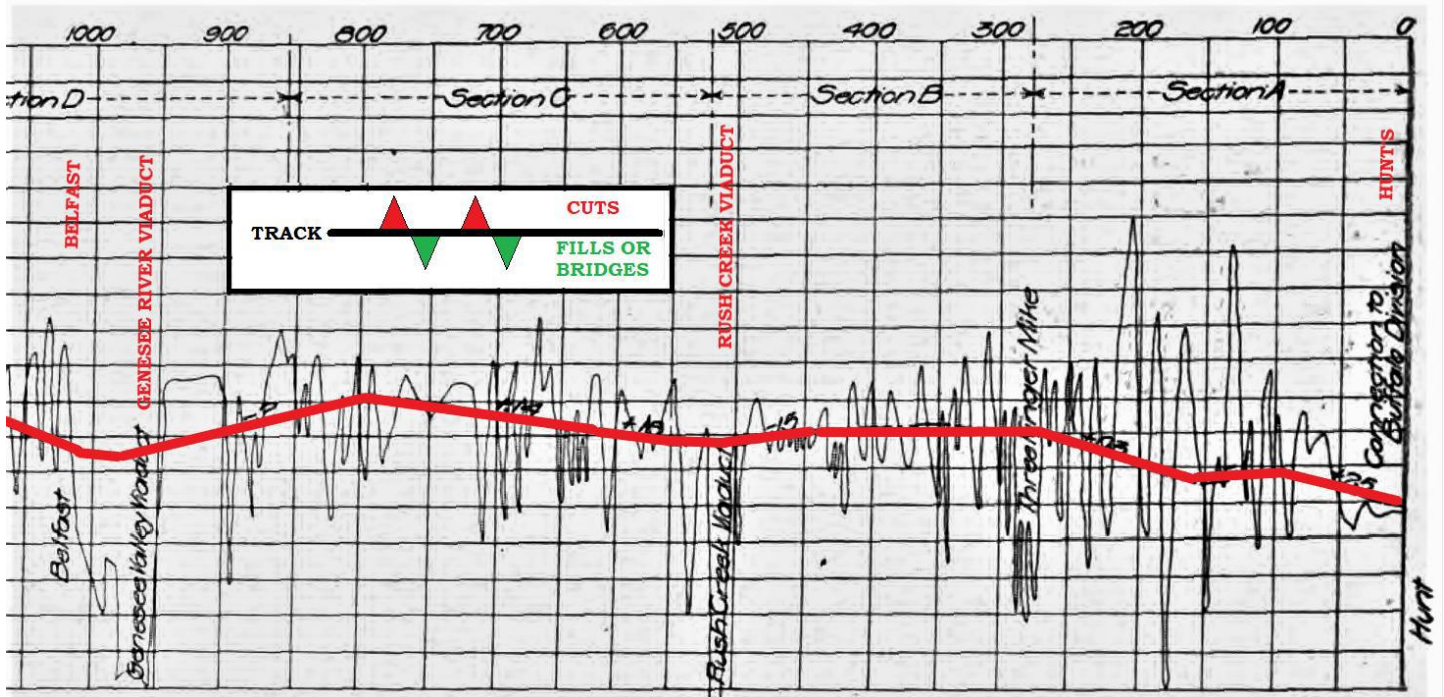
Map of Genesee River Railroad.

About half the line was on the east bank of the Genesee River, but on the second bench more than 100 feet above the river. The many ravines on this section required frequent cuts and fills. When construction began it was anticipated that 3.7 million cubic yards of material (mostly blue clay and shale) would be excavated and that most of it would be needed for fills nearby. A particular need for vast quantities of fill was on the approaches to the huge Genesee River Viaduct near Belfast. As it developed, actually much more excavation was needed, since the work on the two tunnels could not be completed due to soil conditions. (Reportedly named "Canada Slimy Loam".) Instead, two deep cuts replaced the tunnels.

West of the viaduct at Belfast to Cuba Junction the terrain to be crossed was less difficult, the main obstacle being the Baldwin Swamp. The plan to cross 3,000 feet of swamp was to build an embankment about eight feet high above the surface. However, eight feet of fill caused the "crust" of the swamp to break, and all the fill then simply disappeared from sight. As the swamp was actually up to 50 feet deep, piling and a lot more fill than anticipated became necessary.

THE GENESEE RIVER RR - continued

Access to the parts of the 33-mile construction site was difficult, especially for heavy machinery. One steam shovel had to be moved eight miles on track built ahead of it and taken up behind it. Another shovel had nearly made it to the top of a hill when the track beneath it slipped on the wet clay and the shovel slid to the bottom.



HIGH ABOVE THE GENESEE RIVER THERE WERE MANY CUTS AND FILLS

Material removed from cuts was used for fills elsewhere. A number of small industrial-type locomotives (20 and 12 ton) and a fleet of dump cars were employed for this purpose; the maximum haul was about four miles and in some cases, switchbacks were needed.

As built, the line was single track with passing sidings. However, the entire route was designed for a second track to be added. (Additional excavation and bridge work would be required, if the double tracking were to be constructed).

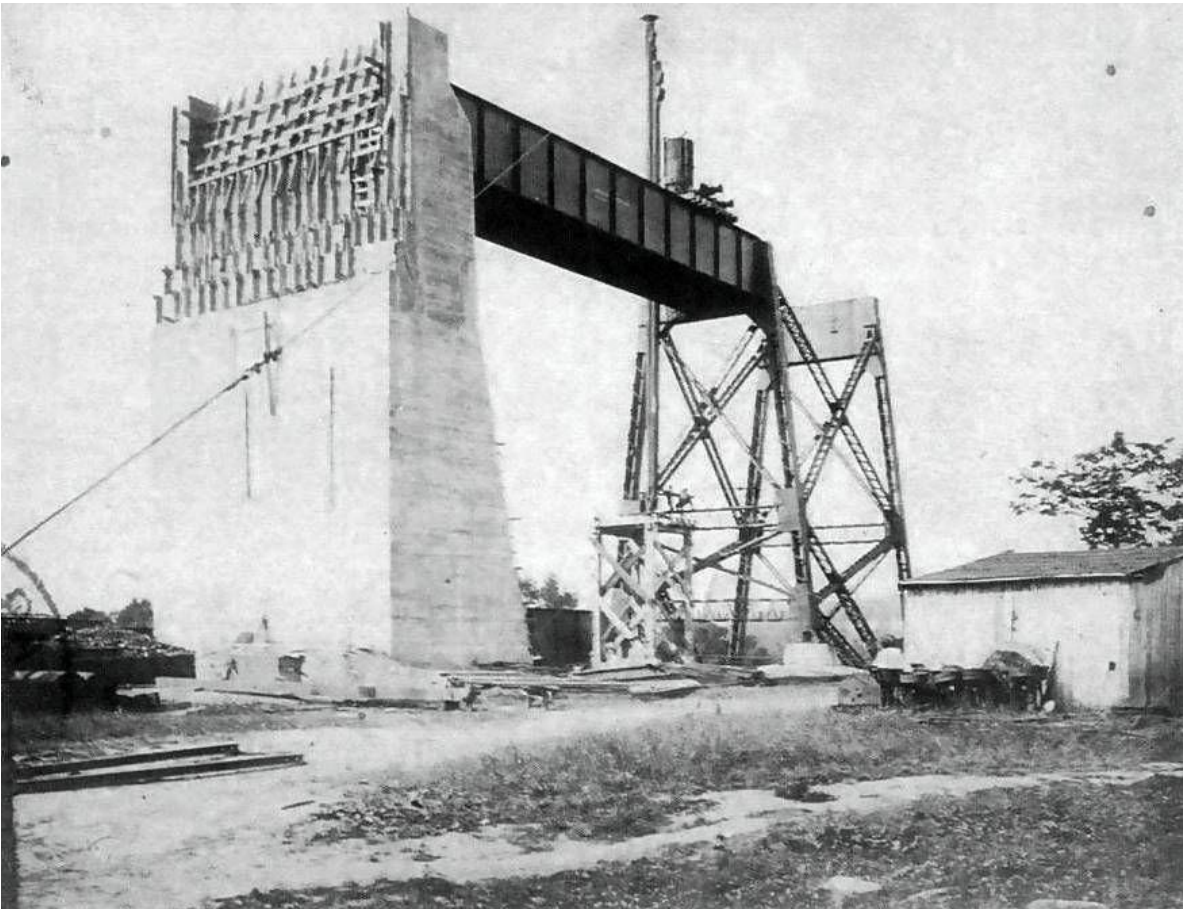
The two most impressive structures were of course the great viaducts over Rush Creek and the Genesee River. Exclusive of approaches, the Rush Creek Viaduct was 1,900 feet in length, and towered 160 feet above the water below. Its construction required 2,253 tons of steel and 4,500 cubic yards of concrete. Like the Genesee River Viaduct, it consisted of alternating 40-ft. and 80-ft. deck plate-girder spans, supported, between the two concrete abutments, by steel towers resting on concrete pedestals. The 40-ft. spans were directly supported by the steel towers. Both the towers and the abutments were designed to accommodate two tracks.

The other structure, the Genesee River Viaduct, was considerably longer at 3,123 ft., but a bit lower in height (135 ft.). The approach from the east was on a 3-deg. curve through a cut nearly a mile in length; 286,000 cubic yards of material was removed to create the cut. On the west approach, an immense 3,300 ft. fill of up to 80 ft. in height and containing 1,050,000 cubic yards of material had to be created. This huge fill was built by first putting up high trestles above where the roadbed would be and then dumping dirt from cars on the trestles. Near the end of this fill a plate-girder bridge carried the GRRR over what would be the short-lived extension of the Buffalo & Susquehanna between Wellsville and Buffalo.

THE GENESEE RIVER RR - continued



BUILDING THE GENESEE RIVER VIADUCT



We will continue the story of the GENESEE RIVER RR in the next ESX.

Love Letter to the PCC Streetcar

By Walter Simpson

Photos by the author unless otherwise noted.

I have a confession to make. Besides being a railfan, I just love trolley cars, especially PCC streetcars which I have had the opportunity to ride many times in my life. But before I tell you my PCC story, let me give you a quick general overview of this remarkable piece of street railway history.

PCC is derived from the Electric Railway Presidents' Conference Committee. This business consortium was formed in 1929 to build a better trolley. It consisted primarily of operators of large trolley systems, trolley car builders, and equipment suppliers.

Trolley cars were the backbone of city public transport in the United States for decades after inventor Frank Sprague demonstrated the practicality of large street railway systems in Richmond, Virginia in 1888. But as early as the late 1920s, trolley systems were under increasing competition from automobiles and buses. The Electric Railway Presidents' Conference Committee sought to address that threat by building a new modern trolley that was stylish, fast, quiet, and comfortable.

While autos and buses eventually displaced trolley cars, the PCC streetcar was highly successful. Almost 5,000 were built in the U.S. between 1936 and 1952 by the St. Louis Car Company and Pullman Standard. Early adopters were transit systems in Brooklyn, Queens, Boston, Pittsburgh, and Toronto.

In all, over 20 American cities (plus three Canadian cities) operated PCC streetcars. The technology was also used extensively in Europe. Because PCC cars are beloved and have historic value, seven American cities and Toronto still operate refurbished models along with several trolley museums.



Now let me use some photos and captions to tell you about my own love affair with the PCC. It all started in Philadelphia where my grandfather (Frank Blotta) took me trolley riding whenever we visited. We would walk to Baltimore Avenue and wait at the corner for a PCC trolley. Hours later we returned by the Market Street Elevated and a much longer walk. My grandfather was blind, so I served as his eyes even though I was just a young boy. Our successful return was always rewarded by a delicious spaghetti dinner prepared by my grandmother (Anna Blotta).

I attended Boston University between 1969 and 1971. My major was philosophy, but I paid at least as much attention to Boston's PCC streetcar system. I lived in Brookline and got to ride the trolley to and from class. While PCC cars had improved riding characteristics, they still swayed and bounced delightfully on the hills and curves of Commonwealth Avenue.

Somedays, I would ride my bike to the trolley yard between Cleveland Circle and the Riverside line to watch PCC cars sitting there doing nothing. I was so mesmerized by the yard's track arrangement that I spent hours sketching it out so someday I'd be able to replicate it in HO scale. That never happened but (fifty years later) I still have that sketch – and do run PCC trolleys on my HO layout.

Love Letter - continued



Boston, Massachusetts. Circa 1970.

My wife Nan and I made two trolley expeditions to Pittsburgh, a great trolley city. On the first one, we walked the tracks of the Overlook route, which ran through the woods and along a steep hill, and rode the PCC to Library, enjoying a line that mimicked a rollercoaster. On our second trip we took Nan's nieces Jenny and Monica and nephew Andrew. We taught them the joys of riding trolleys, especially from the back seat!



Love Letter - continued



In the mid-1980s, the NFTA kindly gave me and my friend Jim Ulrich permission to photograph old Cleveland PCC cars it had obtained for a possible route extension. (The much discussed but never built Tonawanda route over the former Erie Niagara Falls branch.) These were being kept in the DL&W terminal building next to the Buffalo River. While they were in very sad shape, Jim's photos were beauties. *Above photos, Jim Ulrich*

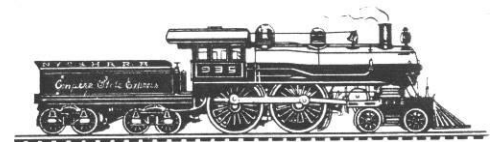
LAST RUN

We regret to note the passing of long time Chapter member Allan M. Starkweather, 74, on November 30, 2022. A Pembroke, NY native, Allan had been the Village of Corfu historian and Town of Pembroke Co-historian since 2003. He wrote many local historical brochures and co-authored a Town of Pembroke History Book in 2012. Allan liked local history, model trains and railroading. A member of numerous local and railway historical groups, he was also a Commissioner of the Corfu Fire District from 2004-2011, and a Member of the Corfu Fire Department from 1964-1978 and from 2006-present day. His other passion was minor league baseball. He was on the Board of Directors of the Genesee County Baseball Club (Muckdogs) since 2004. He was a lifelong member of the Corfu United Presbyterian Church. Alan was a volunteer at Chapter chicken BBQ fundraisers, and a regular at our meetings. Allan is survived by his aunt, Alice Dix and several cousins. A memorial service was held Saturday, Dec. 17, 2022, at the Corfu United Presbyterian Church. The Chapter extends its sincere condolences to the family.

CHAPTER MEMORIES

Story collected by Geoff Gerstung

The Railroad Enthusiast – May 1940 issue



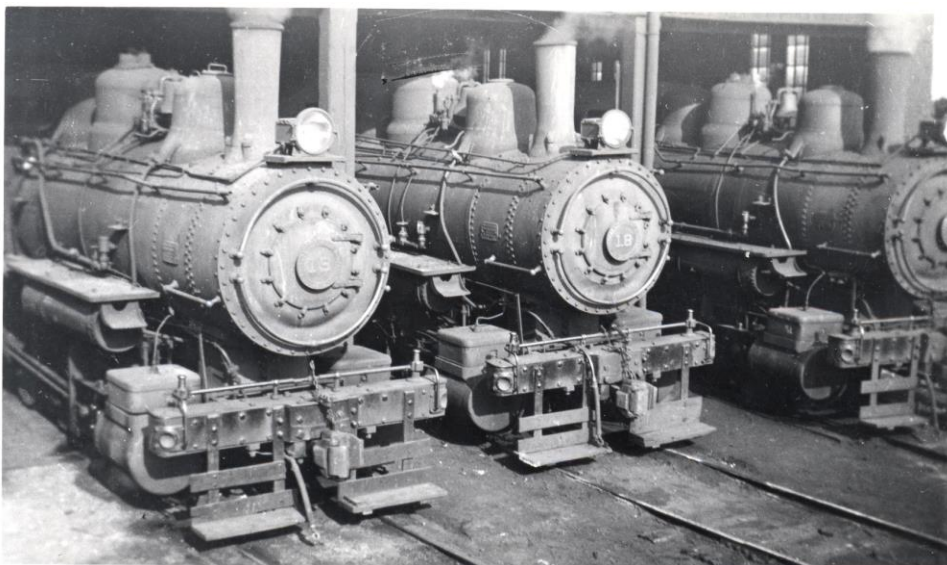
A regular meeting was held on March 1 [1940] in the Lehigh Valley Terminal. The entertainment was provided by the debate teams of Canisius High School, who argued for and against government ownership and operation of American railroads. Both teams presented their arguments well, and the debate proved very interesting. Although none of the railroad fans were in favor of government operation, they all listened intently to both sides of the question.

Sunday, March 31, nineteen Enthusiasts journeyed to Rochester over the New York Central RR to attend a joint meeting with the Rochester Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society.

At the opening of the meeting, Chairman Shapley described in detail each of the trips planned for 1940. Then the Rochester Yardmaster of the New York Central gave a talk, after which several interesting railroad motion pictures were shown. At the close of the meeting, refreshments were served by the NRHS.

ON THE TRACK AHEAD

The February 2023 meeting program has not been confirmed as of press time. Please watch for an update on our website www.nfcnrhs.org.



Buffalo Creek no's 13, 18 and an unidentified sister are steamed up and poking out of their roundhouse stalls on June 30, 1937, no doubt soaking up a bit of that summer sunshine we so prize in our sometimes not so fair-weather city. The unidentified photographer has captured a once common railroad scene we can only imagine today.

CHAPTER CALENDAR

JAN 13 Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center. Program: John M. Prophet's PCC car, 1938 to 1948. Digitized, 16 mm film, 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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