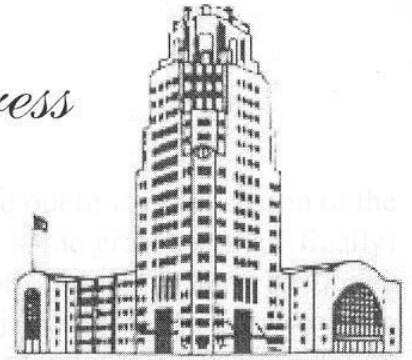


Empire State Express



APRIL 2025

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 11, 2025 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.

MORE TALES OF THE ERIE LACKAWANNA

The Erie Lackawanna Railway remains one of the most iconic Fallen Flags of all Northeastern railroads. Retired EL locomotive engineer and storyteller 'par excellence', Devan Lawton returns with another of his slideshows of the Erie Lackawanna in all its glory before it was absorbed and mostly vanished into Conrail. Devan's extensive photography in good old Kodachrome 35 mm will be a visual and intellectual treat you won't want to miss. Join us at the April meeting program.



Bison Yard, Buffalo NY, April 27, 1974. Photo by Devan Lawton. See page 3 for more about this picture.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Someone once said, “May you live in interesting times”. I don’t want to complain, but I’d rather that they were interesting for different reasons.

Life seems to be very busy, anyway, and Saturdays at the Museum are very productive. We have two member volunteers and a student working in the Archive room under Becky Gerstung’s direction. It is amazing what can be accomplished when the work can be spread out on a table, with good lighting overhead. Things that were only being talked about for years are now in process.

In addition to that work, a network of shiny new copper water pipes has been growing under the building. By the time that you read this the major work will be complete, including the plumbing of the sink in the utility room. Outside we are planning for more trackwork as soon as the season permits. The photos seen below are by M. J. Lewandowski. They are of the three switches that are on Tonawanda Island that were given to us by the City of North Tonawanda, abandoned Tonawanda Island RR trackage. The NT Mayor has kindly arranged for the DPW to assist us in getting them out of the woods and over to our property.



There has been a development that would take a couple of pages to accurately describe. I’ll try to be brief here. At the last session with the Empire State Development Corp. (ESDC) we were advised that we could not apply the interest on our Bridge Loan to the DRI grant for reimbursement. This left us with money from the grant that we didn’t submit any work against. So, now, during the term of the loan we have been paying interest on it. So we asked ESDC what would they allow that we could get done right away? A new roof on the station! There was a lot of scrambling by the Committee to pull this together. Getting bids and assessing them has been proceeding frantically. By the time that you read this, AVA Roofing will have completed or will be working on the new Station roof.

On Saturday March 22nd the Chapter held its 85th Annual Banquet. The new location, in the Community Room of the Amherst United Unitarian Church, suits us well for this event. Some forty plus members and friends enjoyed a delicious buffet lunch with ham, chicken marsala, penne pasta and meat balls, mashed potatoes and mixed vegetables, rolls, coffee, tea and dessert. Chef Bruce and his staff gave us an excellent meal. Nancy Andrycha conducted the silent auction. There were lots of prizes to bid on. The program was spectacular. Aaron Heverin presented the newly digitized B & O films of Jim Van Brocklin with commentary by Terry Sprague. It was an absolutely super program. Absolute proof of why we all belong to the NRHS.

MESSAGE – continued

That program, and the one from last year, are the fruit of the Chapters' Digitalization Initiative. This program was begun informally with the need to save the films that were in the Archives from self-destructing. We started sending them out to a firm in Texas, one at a time, to be converted. It was time consuming and expensive. Aaron developed a way to automate the process and does it for us. Those of you who saw the banquet program have seen what he can do. It's amazing.

Coming up we have our Annual Chiavetta's' Chicken BBQ fundraiser. This will be on Saturday, May 10th. We can use lots of help. Contact Nancy Andrycha if you want to be part the crew.

I know that you are accustomed to seeing the snow closure message here. I'm going out on a limb here and saying we won't need it any more this season. See you at the meeting or at the Museum.

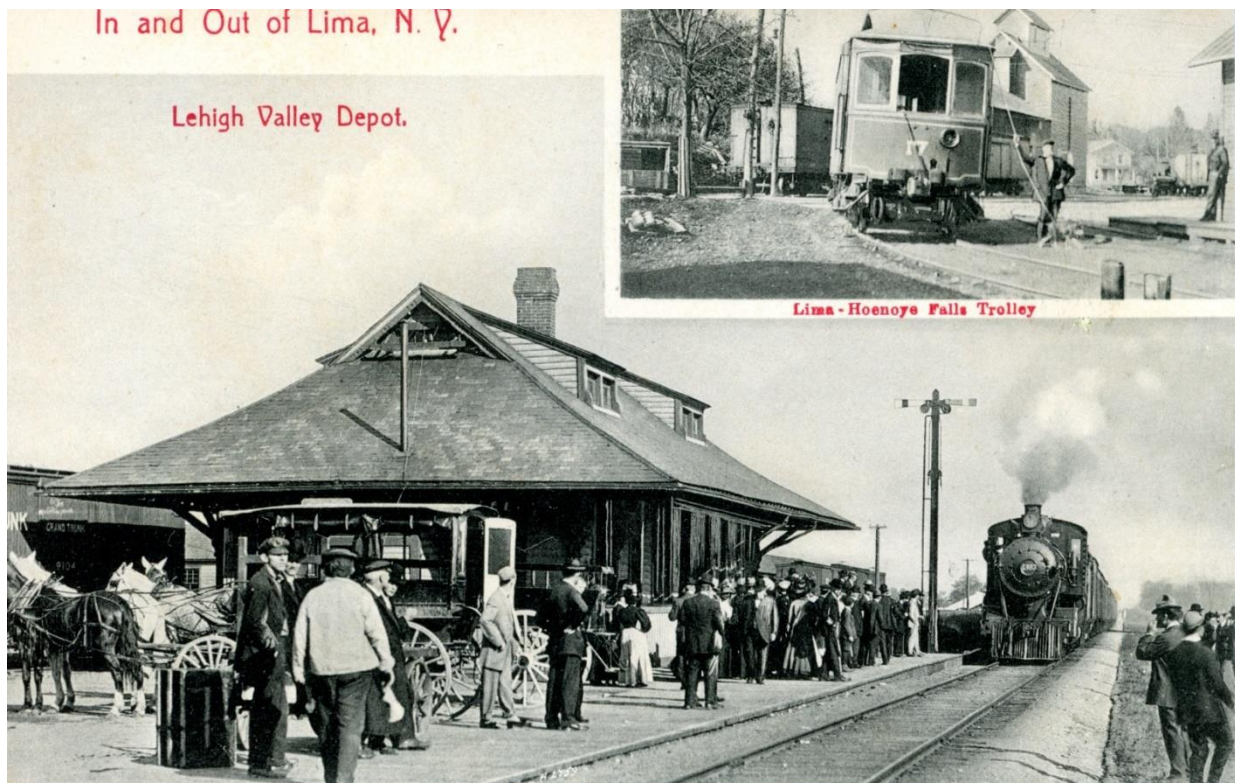
Jim Ball

More about the April ESX cover photo



Bison Yard, located on the east side of Buffalo was a joint operation of the Erie Lackawanna Ry. and Norfolk & Western Ry. N&W acquired the former New York, Chicago & St. Louis, better known as The Nickel Plate Road. N&W was a primary western connection in Buffalo for EL. In the photo two sets of EL Geeps 'pull downs' are performing a typical-day yard service, shuffling cars from one train to another, keeping the freight moving. The departing NW westbound train at left has an ex-Wabash caboose on the tail.

Photo by Devan Lawton



Once Upon A Timetable in Lima, NY circa 1910

WHAT'S ALSO IN THE ESX COVER PHOTO ?



Devan Lawton certainly captured a lot of things for us as railfans and observers of railroads to ponder in the photo he selected for the cover shot in this issue of ESX. Let's zoom in and crop using the left side of his photo as seen in the above closeup. Former passenger E8s are coming in on a westbound train. These locomotives were regeared for freight service after EL exited all long-distance passenger trains on January 4, 1970 when the *Lake Cities* was annulled, but they are still providing yeoman work for the company. That is so cool to see these great looking engines with the beautiful EL paint scheme still looking sharp! In between the caboose and E8s, note the set of open autorack cars. It was sure fun in the 'good old days' to see those with all the brand-new automobiles fresh from the assembly plants making their way to eastern destinations. I can recall many similar autorack scenes on Lehigh Valley freight trains rolling past my vantage point in my Grandma's backyard near Tonawanda Junction. Today all autoracks are enclosed with siding. Apparently, we youths were better behaved back then and did not throw rocks at trains, damaging the new vehicles. Well, at least I never did that! I loved watching the trains and would have 'caught hell' if I had pulled such a stunt. Next, the smooth streamlined caboose #562794 was built for the Wabash RR in September of 1947. Her original number was 2794. But lastly, we have to note the tank car at extreme left on the N&W train which is ready to depart from Bison Yard. It appears to be one which typically would carry an extremely dangerous material, like hydrocyanic acid! How this tank car (or any tank car) ended up just ahead of a caboose is one of those things today we would probably classify as a 'near miss'. Even as an empty, the car would still be potentially dangerous with even a small residue of such material in its hold in the event of a derailment accident or any leakage. "Safety First" with this placement apparently got overlooked on this sunny springtime day of April 27, 1974. Thanks Devan, for providing a great shot with a lot going on in it. - JCD



Chiavetta's Chicken BBQ



**Saturday, May 10
11:00am - 2:30pm**

(Or Sold Out!)

At The

**Railroad Museum of the Niagara Frontier
111 Oliver Street - North Tonawanda**

**Complete Chiavetta's BBQ Chicken Dinner
(1/2 Chicken, Potato Salad, Coleslaw, Roll & Cookie)**

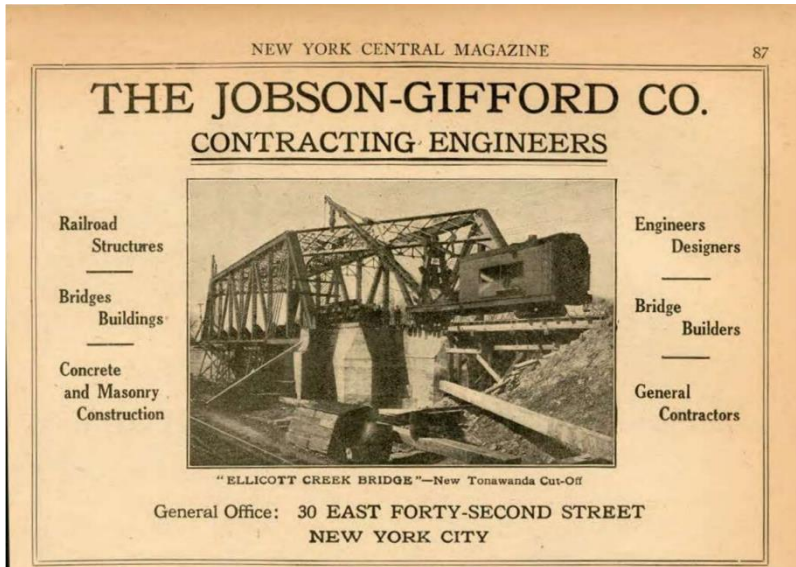
ONLY \$15.00 Each - *Take Out Only*

Advance Purchase Tickets

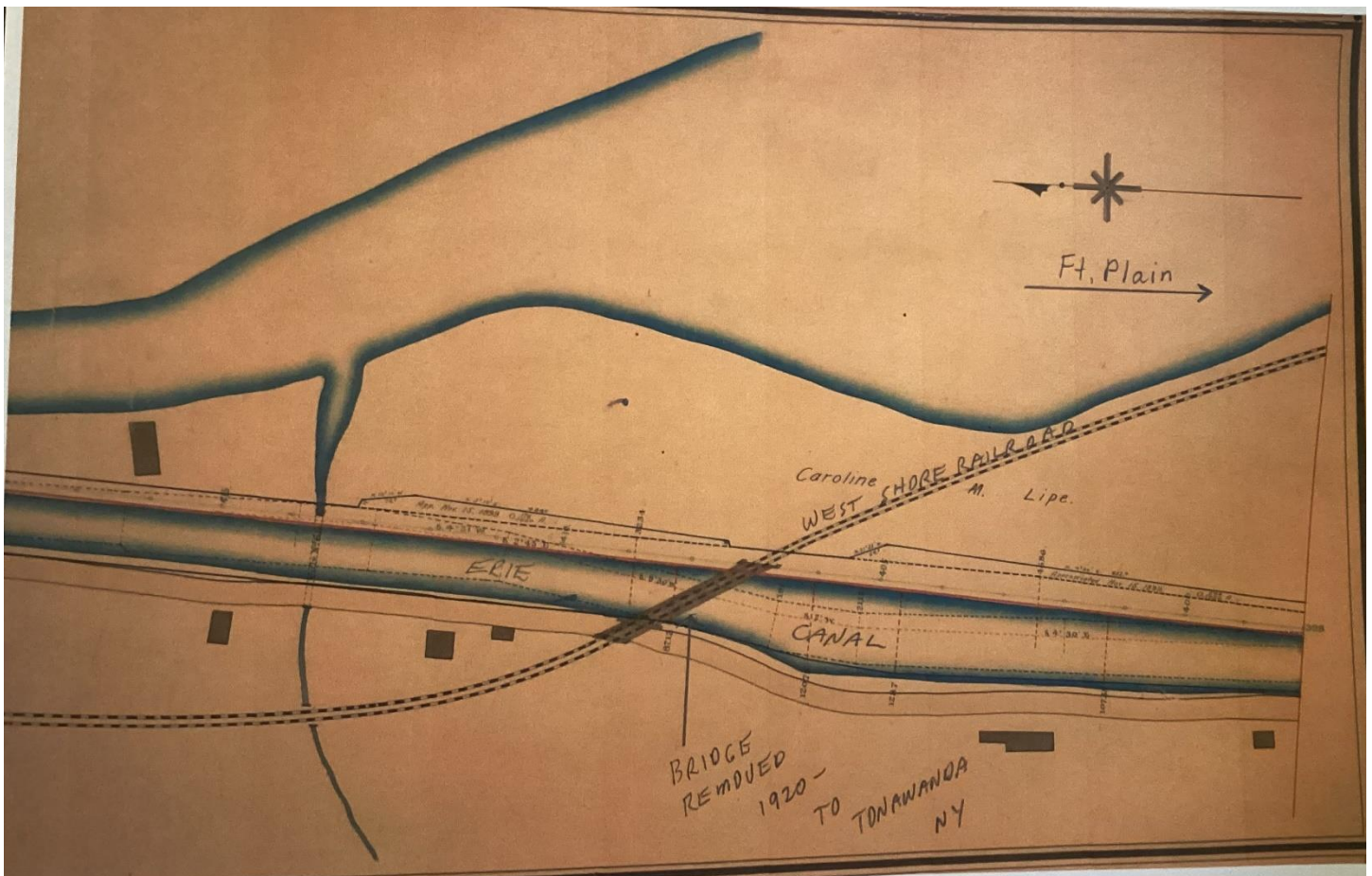
Scan QR Code Or Visit www.nfcnrhs.org



SCENE ON THE LINE



In last month's ESX we reprinted the advertisement at left from the July 1919 New York Central Lines company magazine showing the bridge over Ellicott Creek in the City of Tonawanda on the then under construction cutoff through Tonawanda and North Tonawanda, NY. Larry Gustina has discovered the following additional information. 'The bridge was originally from Fort Plain, NY and is shown on the following map with the notation. Notice the Erie Canal channel.' In the Mohawk Valley, the new Barge Canal utilized the river itself, whereas on the original canal, mule drawn barges and packet boats would not have been able to handle the river current. A near slack-water channel was needed.



Larry Gustina collection. The New York Central replaced the bridge across the old canal with an earthen embankment when the old channel was abandoned.

SCENE ON THE LINE – continued



Original location photo on the West Shore at Fort Plain, NY, probably about 1918 or just before the old canal channel was to be abandoned and filled in. *Larry Gustina collection.*



Today the adjacent former Erie right-of-way is a biking / hiking trail. The old Erie line, parallel here to CSX crossed Ellicott Creek on a plate deck steel bridge and that is in use today as a part of the trail walkway. The very active railroad sees several trains, including Amtrak, daily. *Many thanks to Larry Gustina for providing the additional photos and information.*

Ellicott Creek, Tonawanda, NY - CSX bridge today. *Larry Gustina photo.*



SCENE ON THE LINE – continued

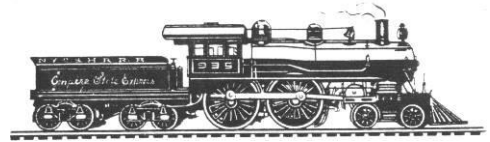


March 19, 2025, Woodward Ave, Tonawanda, NY, 6:47 pm. “This is the evening local (L035) on duty in Niagara Falls at 4 pm. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday they go to Black Rock (Buffalo), turn the train and go into the clear at Robinson St. (North Tonawanda) doing customers on the way. At Robinson St., they serve Rock Ten (paperboard plant), then head out the old Erie branch line to Sheets Cardboard by Niagara Falls Blvd. With work done they run around the train and reverse route back to Niagara Falls. On Tuesday and Thursday, they head to Lockport to service the Falls Road RR. Yesterday was a lite day - one hopper of plastic at Caps Plugs on the old DL&W track by Elmwood Ave in Buffalo then back to Robinson St with the box car in the photo. The blond lady (not visible in this shot) is Amy, the regular engineer on L035. Most Interesting I think!”
Photo by Larry Gustina with caption provided by CSX engineer and Chapter member Rodney Kantorski.



CHAPTER MEMORIES

Story collected by Geoff Gerstung



The Railroad Enthusiast – September-October 1941

A regular meeting was held on June 6 [1941] in the Lehigh Valley Terminal. The speaker was Mr. M.W. Jones of the Public Relations Department of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, who gave us an interesting talk dealing with railroads and national defense and the attitude of the railroads in connection with discontinuing permits for photography during the existing emergency. After the talk various railroad motion pictures were shown. Three local B&O officials were guests at the meeting.

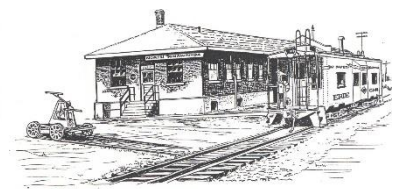
Editor note: we will continue this Memory in the next ESX. On June 15 the group embarked on a fantastic fan trip over the Coudersport & Port Allegany Railroad and the full description of that trip will be reprinted.



Erie Railroad caboose C348 at our museum, July 27, 2024. - JCD

**2025 MEMBERSHIP
RENEWALS ARE NOW
UNDERWAY**

**Have you renewed your Chapter
membership yet? Please renew
now! The Chapter NEEDS YOU!**



ON THE TRACK AHEAD

May's program will be presented by Bruce Becker, "Modern British Passenger Trains (& Some Steam Too!)". It has been a number of years since we've had an in depth look at trains in the UK. And, don't forget the Chapter fundraiser Chiavetta Chicken BBQ on May 10 at the Station. Dinners ready at 11 AM until 2:30 PM or sold out, \$15.00 each. Drive in, Take Out! Lastly, mark your calendar NOW for the June 13th program when Tony Schill returns with a look at the story of Railroads in Manhattan (as in New York City) from modest beginnings of horse drawn street railways in 1832 to 1920 when railways were in their 'golden age'. Don't miss our upcoming meetings!

CHAPTER CALENDAR

- APR 11** **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. Program by Devan Lawton, more 'More Tales of the Erie Lackawanna'.**
- MAY 9** **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. Program by Bruce Becker, 'Modern British Passenger Trains (& Some Steam Too!')**
- MAY 10** **Chiavetta Chicken BBQ at the Station. Drive in, Take Out only. Dinners ready 11 AM to 2:30 PM or sold-out. \$15 per dinner.**
- JUN 13** **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. Program by Tony Schill, "Development of Railways in Manhattan"**

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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RAILROAD MUSEUM ADDRESS: 111 OLIVER ST. NORTH TONAWANDA, NY



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