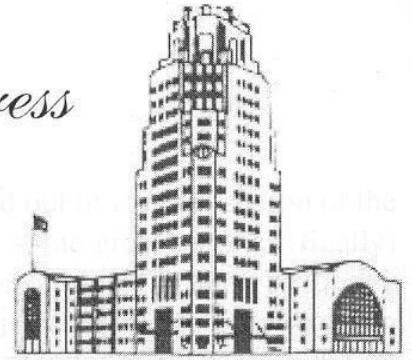


## *Empire State Express*



**SEPTEMBER 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, September 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.

### **THE FLYING SCOTSMAN**



How would you like to take a USA cross country train trip of 3,200 miles? Come to the September meeting and ride behind 4-6-2 Pacific type British steam locomotive of the London & North Eastern Ry. named the **Flying Scotsman**. Peter E. Gores, Gary Youngberg and Devan Lawton take you on an adventure from Buffalo to Oroville, CA during September of 1971-62 years ago this month. The route included Norfolk & Western (former NKP), Elgin, Joliet & Eastern, Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, Northern Pacific, Great Northern and Spokane, Portland & Seattle and Western Pacific. Engine 4472 is 100 years old this year and is still operational! In the photo above, it is September 2, 1971 and the location is Bison Yard, joint facility of the Erie Lackawanna Ry. and Norfolk & Western Ry. in Buffalo. Pete Gores in an engineer cap and traditional overalls stands next to the locomotive. Photo by Devan Lawton. More photos on page 5.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Well, here we are again. It was only two months of layoff for the ESX but it seems like so much more. I think that's because so much happens during June, July and August. It is an endless parade of festivals, picnics and events. There are annual vacation trips, summer projects, and mowing. Among the things that go on is people go visit the Railroad Museum. We have had a good number of visitors this season, some weeks an average of twelve people would come through on a Saturday.

The work that got done this year from the D. R. I. grant is amazing. The parking lot is done, including two light towers. Most of the property is fenced. The sign has been relocated. The loading dock is done. The very last details of our ADA compliance are complete. There are stairs on EL-2 and two new steel doors. There is a new steel door on the north end of the station. The second west side door is now a solid wall. The third west door has a "person door" that opens to a brand-new set of concrete stairs leading to a walkway (still under construction) in the equipment compound. There is "down lighting" built into the eaves of the station. The fascia is now made of synthetic material (which we will never have to repaint or replace), we also have gutters both front and back. The timber loading dock bumpers have been replaced. Some of them (probably most of them) were original to the building.

There is still a lot to do, most of it by us or by someone that we hire. Signage and equipment painting will be funded from the D. R. I. grant.

So much work got done at the Museum this year that we needed a way to show all of you. We owe Bruce Becker a huge "Thank You" for orchestrating our upcoming Chapter Picnic. We hope to see lots of you there. Come see what we have gotten done!

In other news, some months ago Aaron Heverin received permission for the Chapter to borrow the John Prophets films from the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania. He has completed the copy work and has returned the original material to that museum. Coming from this will be digital videos of John's films to be shown to us at meetings. I think we all owe Aaron a big "THANK YOU" for the investment that he made of his time and talent.

The "Forty Eight Hour Film Project" is an annual film competition in which teams of filmmakers are assigned a genre, a character, a prop and a line of dialog. They then have 48 hours to produce a short film containing those elements. During the weekend of July 15-16 our hundred-year-old station was taken over by Hollywood. A 7-1/2-minute film was written, cast, filmed, edited and produced in 48 hours on location at our museum. The film, *Die Dame (The Lady)*, by Shady Acres, was nominated for eleven awards and won for best location. It came in second overall in the worldwide competition. I was privileged to see the finished film. It's so very cool to recognize the different areas of our museum in the various scenes. Another big "Thank You" to Bruce for bringing them to us and babysitting the museum during the process.

Going forward, we are now into September and regular activity schedule. One note to pass on. Becky Gerstung has stepped down as Recording Secretary. On behalf of the Chapter, I want to thank her for many years of service in that capacity. We are looking for a replacement.

Remember, without the Preservation and the Restoration, there can be no Interpretation.

With that, I hope everyone is well and I hope to see you at the meeting.

*Jim Ball*

## OUR STATION'S STORY

*From the Erie Railroad Magazine, January 1923*

North Tonawanda, known as the "Lumber City", is located midway between the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls on the Buffalo division. It also, being the Eastern terminus of Lake Erie navigation and the Western terminus of the New York Barge Canal, gives it excellent transportation facilities and keen competition of the railroads.

Although North Tonawanda and Tonawanda are separate cities politically and divided only by Ellicott creek, they are called the Twin Cities of the Niagara Frontier, and in reality, constitute one city with a population of 30,000.

Educationally, the city boasts of its completely equipped schools, consisting of two high schools, nine private and three special schools. One modern hotel and three progressive banks add greatly by placing this city on equal standard with other cities of its size.

During the month of June 1918, the Erie passenger service was taken off the Falls branch, which permitted a large growth in freight traffic. Since that time revenue at this point has increased 400 per cent. On January 1, 1920, the station was destroyed by fire, but it has been replaced by a new and modern structure. This is a brick building of one story, 220 feet long and 24 feet wide; the office, 60 feet by 24 feet, is divided into four rooms, the agent's private office, cashier's office, clerks' room and record room. The freight house is 160 feet long and 24 feet wide, containing the foreman's office and a perishable freight room. Ample house room is given for the handling of freight. Steam heat and electric lights, together with ideal design and layout of this building, make it a model.

Lumbering in this district is the leading industry, approximately one hundred million feet being shipped out of the city during the past year. About 75 per cent of the lumber received at this point is via lake, while the remaining 25 per cent is via rail. Also, many shipments of lumber are received from the Pacific Coast by all-boat line, via Panama and Erie canals. Out of a total of eighty industries reached by switching, thirty of these are lumber. There are twenty-four industries located on our tracks, twenty-five on the New York Central and three on the International Railway Company, also twenty-eight handled jointly with the Erie and New York Central. This permits the Erie to reach the total of eighty industries either directly or through switching service.



*At the south end of the station, a large sign, "ERIE RR FREIGHT OFFICE" extends about 20 feet in length with foot high letters, attached to the roof eaves. Erie RR employees are identified as: Nick Cairman, trucker; A.H. Jacobson, foreman, L.A. Creedon, yard clerk; Adelaide Slattery, typist; Marion McCarthy, cashier; H. J. Eberhart, yard clerk; J.A. Potter, rate clerk; E.F. Smith, claims and tracer, F.C. Jay, chief clerk; W. J. Fitzsimmons, report clerk and J.H. Dolan, agent."*

*A large copy of this photo is on display in the museum. The article errs in its reference to the boundary. The cities are divided by the Erie*

*Canal, which at this location is also the natural watercourse for Tonawanda Creek. Ellicott Creek joins the canal/Tonawanda Creek east of Main Street, Tonawanda.*

## OUR STATION's STORY – continued



North Tonawanda

*This is the original wood frame Erie RR North Tonawanda station, built in the 1870s, located on the same site as the current structure. One hundred years ago the present freight station, now our museum, was constructed to replace the above pictured building after a fire on January 1, 1920 destroyed it. During the interim between the fire and completion of the replacement building, it is likely the agent worked out of a temporary office, perhaps an old coach or even a retrofitted boxcar. No photos of that operation*

*have been found so far. Above photo from the historic Erie Depots online photo archive, digitized from an original glass plate negative. This picture was likely taken about 1906 when J.E. Bailey completed his photographic survey of the Erie for the railroad's management.*

### **The Rest of the story:**

Although passenger service on the Niagara Falls branch ended before the present building was built, the station served the freight needs of the Erie Railroad very well from the 1920s, through the lean years of the Great Depression of the 1930's followed by the incredible flood of rail traffic during the early 1940's and the Second World War. Twin Cities industry fully participated in the war effort and the agency office and adjacent yard team tracks were bustling with activity. The Erie entered the postwar period in an optimistic mood. Like all American railroads it was believed that passenger service would stay stable, that freight traffic would only continue its healthy volume and future growth would be robust. Within a decade, rail traffic had noticeably slipped and industry along the line was in a gradual decline as facilities relocated or converted to motor transport. The shift of industry first to the US southern states and then overseas had begun. Older factories were plagued with high labor costs, as was the railroad. In an effort to survive, in late 1960 the Erie merged with rival Delaware, Lackawanna & Western to become Erie Lackawanna. The North Tonawanda station soldiered on as traffic faded and the agency was finally closed. The building and nearby Erie 2 (later EL2) interlocking tower continued to be used by the signal and maintenance of way departments until the coming of Conrail on April 1, 1976. The former Niagara Falls branch was abandoned by Conrail and soon the building was surplus and would likely have been demolished as Conrail disposed of surplus property. The Buffalo Chapter, NRHS had been looking for a home to establish a museum of local railroading. After much review and negotiation, the Chapter purchased the property in 1987 including the nearby interlocking tower (which is one of only two still standing in western New York), and leased a portion of the former track mainline right of way with an eye towards preservation and eventual restoration. The late Geoff Gerstung spearheaded this project through its infancy.



## OUR STATION's STORY – continued

There were massive holes in the roof and peeling paint along with tons of rubbish to be cleaned up. In the over 30 years since, incremental efforts to establish a museum have taken root thanks to hundreds of small donors and a lot of hard work by dozens of loyal volunteers. The most recent State of New York grant through its DRI (Downtown Revitalization Initiative) has seen the most transformational effort to date, providing substantial funding for numerous projects to improve the exterior appearance of the building and EL2 tower. We now have a paved and handicap accessible parking lot, new fencing, security lighting, replacement of windows and doors with historically compatible and energy efficient designs, new signage and roof gutters and repairs to the fascia, a reconstructed loading dock and numerous lighting and electrical improvements. These projects will soon be completed and enable the building to become a first-class museum and tourist destination. Along with efforts directed to the physical condition of the buildings through the DRI, the Chapter has been methodically building and improving an archive of historic photographs, films, maps and railroad artifacts that can help tell the story of railroads. Displays in the station have improved every year and we now have several permanent displays. About every two years a major change out of the large display cabinet occurs. Currently we are showcasing the construction of the historic Buffalo Central Terminal, built by the New York Central Railroad in an Art Deco style and opened in 1929 when railroads were at their peak. The library has a large collection of railfan periodicals and numerous books. The archives include numerous photo albums of rare pictures dedicated to the railroads that called Buffalo and western New York home. Digitization of historic photos, movie films and sound recordings are part of ongoing projects. JCD

## ANNUAL CHAPTER CALENDAR

The 2024 edition of the Chapter's railroad calendar which offers 13 historic photos of railroading in and around western New York and nearby Ontario will be available at the September meeting. It makes a great Christmas gift. Remember, the photos are provided by our members or otherwise come from the museum collection. All proceeds support the Chapter and its ongoing mission to preserve and interpret the history of Buffalo's railroads. 'Thank You' in advance for your continuing support of the annual calendar.



**Flying Scotsman's** bell is being polished by Devan Lawton as the engine and its exhibition train prepare to depart Buffalo's Bison Yard on September 2, 1971. The General Manager of the Scotsman trip, George D. Hinchcliff stands at right Above: West of Flathead Tunnel on the old Great Northern, Devan is chasing the 60 mph Flying Scotsman and its 8-car exhibition train. September 1971. Photos by Devan Lawton.

CHAPTER PICNIC



***You Are Invited To Join Us  
To Celebrate Our  
Museum Improvement Project!***

**Ribbon Cutting, Open House  
& BBQ Picnic**

at the

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

**Saturday, September 9, 2023**

**2:00pm - 5:00PM**



**Tour The Museum Improvements**

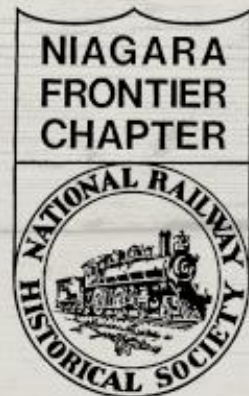


**Complimentary BBQ Picnic**

*(Donations Welcome)*



**Bring Your Lawn Chairs**



**[www.nfcnrhs.org](http://www.nfcnrhs.org)**



## SCENE ON THE LINE

Photos by Jon Rothenmeyer



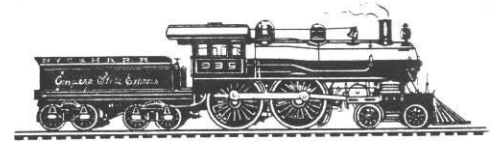
On the brilliant early summer day of Father's Day weekend, June 17, 2023, New York & Lake Erie's pair of classic Alco FA locomotives piloted round trip excursions, Gowanda to South Dayton, NY. Above: The locomotives are about to change ends to pull the next trip south through the rural glory of Cattaraugus County. Below: It is nearly 4:30 PM and the excursion has returned to Gowanda and passengers have detrained. The locomotives are heading into the late afternoon sun for the house and a well-deserved rest. The old Alco switcher, still in B&O colors, has not turned a wheel in years, but adds additional nostalgia to this shortline, which was much loved by Jon for photography, some fast-paced chases, and numerous train rides over some four decades. These photos are Jon's last look at the NY&LE.



## CHAPTER MEMORIES

Story collected by Geoff Gerstung

### The Railroad Enthusiast – September-October 1940 issue



#### PICNIC

On Sunday, July 7, [1940] members of the Buffalo and Central New York Divisions attended a joint picnic with the Rochester Chapter of the NRHS at Silver Lake, NY. The Rochester Branch and Silver Lake Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio RR were used to reach this point.

#### N. St. C. & T TRIP

On Sunday, July 28, [1940] the second international railfan trip out of Buffalo took place when a group of 60 fans made a trip over the entire system of the Niagara, St. Catherines & Toronto Railway, and electric interurban line of the Canadian National Railways.

After riding from Buffalo to Niagara Falls, NY on the New York Central, the group crossed a bridge to Niagara Falls, Canada, where a special multiple-unit train of two big wooden interurban cars was waiting. The special proceeded over the main line to St. Catherines and the west branch to Port Dalhousie [sic] on Lake Ontario. Following a lay-over for dinner, the cars returned to St. Catherines and ran over the Port Weller branch on which no passenger service has been operated for nine years. After a trip over the east branch to Port Dalhousie [sic], a visit to the car house and shops in St. Catherines was made. Following a round trip over the long Welland Sub-division between Thorold and Port Colborne on Lake Erie, the special traversed the two-mile spur to Walker's Quarry. Then the return trip to Niagara Falls concluded the excursion on the electric line.

#### AUGUST MEETING

At the regular meeting held on August 2 [1940] in the Lehigh Valley Terminal, the entertainment was furnished by Mr. Jerome M. Kraemer, a model railroader, who showed several reels of old-time motion picture comedies. In some of these the action took place on railroads.

#### ON THE TRACK AHEAD



A DVD of the Lehigh Valley's Buffalo Division will be viewed at the October meeting. This is an excellent, professional quality production with sound digitized from vintage movie film. It includes many rare views including such exotic things as switching of passenger cars at Buffalo's downtown LV station in the late 1940's.

*LVRR steel caboose A95100 is one of 105 "Northeastern style" cabooses was built in the Sayre, PA shops in February 1941. Restored in 2012 it is seen at the Rochester & Genesee Valley Railroad Museum in Industry, NY on October 9, 2022. Photo by Jon Rothenmeyer.*



## MARKERS – LAST RUN

I deeply regret to report the passing of my friend of 46 years and fellow Chapter member Jon Rothenmeyer on August 8, 2023 after a nearly yearlong battle with complications related to pancreatic cancer. Jon showed remarkable courage and fortitude after he was given the devastating diagnosis late last year. He was hospitalized on two occasions in the interim and fought bravely to get back to some level of 'normal'. Jon was a great supporter of the Chapter and all things railroad, having joined both the NRHS (National) and Buffalo Chapter in 1977. Jon loved traveling by train and railfan photography. Over the years Jon provided numerous programs from his extensive slide collection of his original work. With the Chapter or on trips with friends to distant places, he rode many excursions. One of his all-time favorite trips was on VIA Rail, riding the Chaleur out to Perce, Quebec. He was especially interested in railroad stations, their architecture, history, and the passenger trains that once served them. Jon made the statement to me many years ago; "Stations are the last vestige of the passenger train." He was a decades long member of the Railroad Station Historical Society and attended many of their annual "station safari" tours which have operated all over the United States. He organized and hosted the 1985 meeting of that group in Buffalo. Jon was a lifelong resident of Clarence, NY. He was well known in his church, the Clarence Church of Christ, of which he was also a lifelong member.

The New York & Lake Erie was one of his favorite local railroads as it operates through the rural splendor of Cattaraugus County where his family once maintained a camp property for many years. Jon took his last ride on the NY&LE this past Father's Day weekend and greatly enjoyed the trip despite being in declining health and unable to do as much photography as was his custom. (See photos page 7.) His very last trip by train was a ride on the Arcade & Attica in mid-July along with his brother, sister-in-law and one of his nephews and his family. He was especially happy to meet his three young great nieces for the first time. They all wanted a 'train ride with Uncle Jon'. Despite being in pain and quite frail, Jon did the day trip and enjoyed it very much. In railroad terms, we know that a 'High Green' signal means the track ahead is clear and that it is safe for the train to 'highball'. Jon has seen that signal and is on his way. JCD



*Jon shows off his railroad display on view at the Town of Clarence Historical Society. August 22, 2021.*

## CHAPTER CALENDAR

- SEP 8** Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. Program by Devan Lawton, "The Flying Scotsman", a 3200-mile trip from Buffalo to California in September 1971 with the famous steam locomotive.
- SEP 9** Chapter Picnic at the Station. See details inside, page 6.
- OCT 13** Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. Program: Lehigh Valley's Buffalo Division.

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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