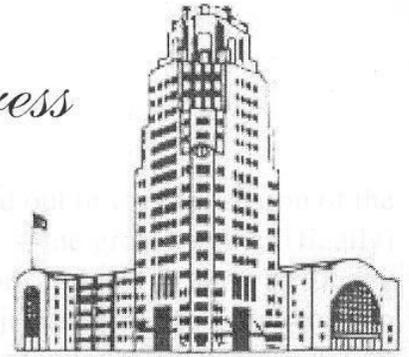


## Empire State Express



**SEPTEMBER 2022**

PUBLICATION OF THE NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER NRHS, INC.

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The meeting of the Chapter is scheduled for Friday, September 9 2022 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.

### **DIGITIZED HISTORIC CHAPTER FILMS**



Years ago the now late Jim Van Brocklin put together a 'best of' movie film of some of the Chapter's earlier years. This film was thought to have been lost but eventually turned up. Member Aaron Heverin has professionally digitized this and was able to recover an audio track by Jim who described the contents. Come see your Chapter's history on the big screen!

*Photo: New York Central 2-8-0 #1199 at Black Rock (Buffalo) on October 26, 1954. James A. VanBrocklin, Niagara Frontier Chapter NRHS archives.*

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Where do I start? Since the last writing, only two months ago, so much has happened. First off, the Canal Fest parade was cancelled. No parking cars for us. Then we had three major problems hit us. First the surface decking of the loading dock had gotten really bad. Since it's not a fenced in area, we elected to sheet it over with plywood. This removed the tripping hazard and the step through hazard. A generous donor paid for the plywood! Thanks to Al Le Teste, Ben Hiltz and Cadin Frey for screwing the new plywood down. Great luck, problem solved for the immediate future.

We then turned our attention to another problem. Early in June we arrived at the Museum to find the Archive room temperature way above where it is supposed to be. The fault was a failed blower motor in the HVAC unit. Attempts to repair it were unsuccessful and we had to have the entire unit replaced. It was only twenty-five years old. The cost for this was an unexpected \$1800, something that the treasury wasn't ready for. We were rescued by a White Knight who has asked us what we needed before. Niagara County Legislator (8<sup>th</sup> district) Rich Andres was instrumental in the Chapter being awarded \$1800 in funding for the HVAC replacement for the Archives room. Just what we needed! The work is done and paid for. Our Archival Treasures are safe.

During that same time period, we discovered that our boxcar was sinking. The track ties were so bad that there was danger of it tipping over. The only thing to do was to rebuild the siding. We moved the car forward (north) two feet, tore out the track behind it and rebuilt that section first. Then we will pull the car onto the new track and will rebuild the section in front of it. No small accomplishment for just a handful of volunteers. There is nothing like shoveling ballast and wrestling ties into place and driving spikes on a hot day. Huge thanks to Randy, Neal, Steve and the guys from Rochester (Rand Warner, John Reddon, Duncan Richards, Dave Chapus and Rich Isreals) who helped out. The work was done without anyone getting hurt, and without breaking the budget too badly. Thanks to Karen Frey who provided a great lunch.

A major thanks to Randy Bugucki who took on the track project. He wrote up the Scope of Work proposal, advised on equipment and materials needed and put in many hours of labor. Thanks also to Steve Frey for loaning us his John Deere tractor and operating it. Thanks to Neal for his labor and expertise. Thanks to Ben Hiltz, Greg Gerstung, Dan Sikorski for their part in the project. Thanks also to the Zuba Family for the loan of their Bobcat and to Jason Zuba for spending the day with us as operator. The project is taking longer than it should due to our inability to get more ties. We have used up all that we had and the handful that Neal provided. There are a lot of ties around, but acquiring enough that are good enough for our purposes is somehow very difficult. The Membership has been very generous in donating funds (approximately \$1,700) to this end. Getting good value for those dollars should not be this hard! However, the Committee continues to work on the problem. I'm sure we'll succeed eventually.

As I write this, we are looking at a final push on the first Saturday in September, the 3<sup>rd</sup>. If all goes well we should be able to set the bumper back in place, weld it and pull the boxcar onto the newly rebuilt track. Hopefully we can acquire some ties to install next to the loading dock. We will have to buy another truckload of ballast.

We changed the hours that the Museum is open this year, opening at 11 am. I think that we will find at the end of the season that our visitor numbers are up because of that. Many of these folks were on their way to other places, Niagara Falls, or the Herschel Carrousel Factory Museum for instance. In addition to this steady stream of visitors this summer was the S gauge modelers convention. There were 35 visitors to the station on Tuesday August 2<sup>nd</sup>. They looked at everything, many had complimentary things to say about the Museum. They spent almost \$100 on things that we had for sale and we received a donation from the convention group for hosting them as well. Thanks to Becky, Greg and Bob Andrycha for their help.

We have been wondering for some time what had happened to a "best of" film that the late Jim Van Brocklin had made. Well it finally turned up in the Archives and it has been digitized for presentation at the September meeting. The expression "You don't want to miss this!" seems insufficient here. This is going to be Fabulous!

**MESSAGE** - continued

I'm writing this for September and wondering where the days went. Re-reading the above text, I think I know. The reality of it is that June, July and August contain only 13 Saturdays. Given the number of Festivals, Fairs, Vacation Trips and Railfan Activities to be crammed in, our "Season" is way too short.

Things coming up; Chapter Member and author Walter Simpson will be giving a talk on Energy and Steam Locomotives at the Buffalo History Museum on Wednesday, October 5<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm. The title is "The Mighty Steam Locomotive: A Technological History". The event is free, begins at 6 pm. The Museum is on Nottingham Terrace at Elmwood Ave.

On August 30<sup>th</sup>, Greg and I sat down with former Mayor of N. Tonawanda Art Pappas at his new gig. He is the host of a radio (WEBR 1440 am) show called Northtown News. We recorded a segment that aired on Thursday September 1<sup>st</sup>. You could probably find it on their website.

The Historic Marker, referred to as the "Spy Marker", to be placed in Niagara Falls, has been on order with the foundry since early in June. There could be an unveiling ceremony later this year. In other Historic Marker News, the marker at Midway Park has been moved. It was at the side of the road and now has been moved into the park interior and is alongside the actual right of way. The consensus seems to be that this is a much better location. I agree.

The 2023 Chapter Calendar will be for sale at the September meeting. We have in previous years, offered a special first day price of only \$10 each at that meeting. The Calendar Committee advises that that will be the case again. Get 'em now, makes a great Holiday Gift!

The WNYRHS train show will be held at the Hamburg Fairgrounds on Saturday and Sunday November 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> at the Fairgrounds. We will have tables and exhibits. Any help with loading, carting in and setting up, as well as carting out and transporting back to the Museum, will be greatly appreciated. Call Becky at 716-434-5665 to volunteer.

With that, I hope to see you at the meeting.

*Jim Ball*



Station siding reconstruction. August 6, 2022 Photo by Jim Ball. More photos on page 6.

## SCENE ON THE LINE



**“Once we built a railroad, we made it run, and it ran for many years....”**

### **The end of the Somerset Railroad.** June 30, 2022.

Drake Settlement Road crossing in Town of Newfane, NY

Serving the then newly constructed coal fired electric power station for New York State Electric & Gas at Somerset on Lake Ontario, the utility also built the new branch trackage and it opened in 1983 with Conrail providing service into the facility. When CSX acquired Conrail, it began servicing the facility. But global warming issues with coal fired steam plants doomed the facility politically, and the once hailed unit coal trains of the Somerset are now no more. There were 428 newly constructed hopper cars, with the distinctive Somerset Railroad logo, which were built to be rotary dumped at the plant. The line is now being ripped up and the power plant is shut down. No other customers located along the branch off of the Falls Road which also utilized right of way once occupied by the electric interurban Buffalo, Lockport & Olcott Beach (later International Railway Company in 1902) and some of the old New York Central's Hojack line in Appleton, NY. Soon after the line opened, our Chapter had a fan trip over the route and into the power plant. The spectacular new curved bridge over “the Gulf” in Lockport, NY was a highlight. We had a grand tour of the facility including the incredible elevated control tower room for the coal handling and rail yard. Your editor recalls Al Kerr as being absolutely thrilled about the new railroad; the unit coal trains and the business it meant for the railroad and his employer, NYSEG. The line lasted only a little over 30 years. Who would have ever predicted this turn of events?

*Photo by Tony Schill*



## SCENE ON THE LINE - AMTRAK in BUFFALO



Amtrak # 63, the Niagara Falls bound Maple Leaf is exiting the north portal of Tunnel 2 just west of Exchange Street station deep in downtown Buffalo, August 7, 2021.

Both photos by Larry Gustina

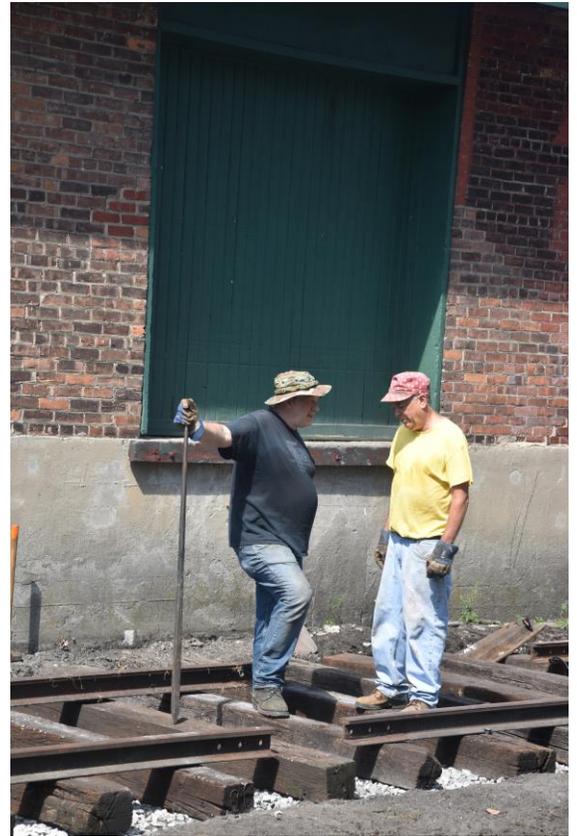


A treat: specially painted for Amtrak's 50th anniversary, P 42 D AC # 108. July 6, 2022

## SCENR ON THE LINE - Restoration of the Station's siding



Left to right Rand Warner, John Reddon, Neal Keirn, Randy Bugicki, Dave Chapus. August 6, 2022.



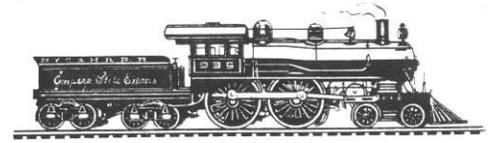
Above: Randy Bugucki and John Reddon, Jim Ball photo August 6, 2022. Bottom left, Steve Frey on the "bobcat" tractor from the Zuba family which has greatly assisted with the project. *All photos by Jim Ball*



## CHAPTER MEMORIES

Story collected by Geoff Gerstung

The Railroad Enthusiast – November 1939 issue



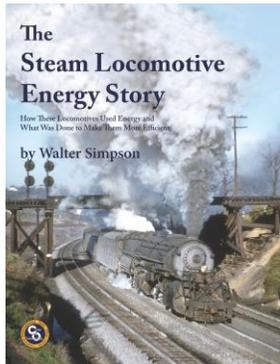
### Mount Jewett Trip

The Buffalo Division operated its second annual autumn leaf excursion on Sunday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, this year [1939] to Mount Jewett, PA. on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, when a group of 61 boarded an extra coach on B&O train 51 leaving [Buffalo's] Lackawanna Station at 11:15 am.

After traversing 100 miles of scenic country, the train reach Mount Jewett, high in the beautiful mountains of northwestern Pennsylvania at an elevation of 2200 feet, and the highest point on the B&O between Buffalo and Pittsburgh. The schedule permitted a wait of only one hour for the northbound train. During this brief period a number of persons hired automobiles to take them to see the famous Kinzua Bridge. Situated three miles from Mount Jewett on a branch of the Erie Railroad, this bridge is 301 feet high and 2250 feet in length and has had no passenger service over it for many years.

The return trip was made on B&O train 52 arriving in Buffalo at 6:20 pm. Excellent weather prevailed during the entire day, and the trip was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone.

### ON THE TRACK AHEAD



Next month, Walter Simpson will discuss the subject of his latest book, *The Steam Locomotive Energy Story: How These Locomotives Used Energy and What Was Done to Make Them More Efficient*. If you recall Walter's previous program on the diesel locomotive, and his superb program on turbine locomotives, you will for sure not want to miss this crowning achievement of the railroad literature. Walter's program will make generous use of many photo views of the steam engine in all its glory, like this example seen below on the Norfolk & Western at Weller yard (Grundy, Virginia) of the magnificent articulated behemoths that once strode over its rails. Those were the days my friend! Walter will show us there's more to a steam locomotive than just fire and water.



**Donation of Daniel Bierut Railroad Library**  
*to the*  
**Niagara Frontier Chapter, National Railway Historical Society**

January 27, 2022

Daniel Bierut was born June 12, 1960 in Lackawanna, New York, to Regina (nee Lutomski) and Edward J. Bierut, a Civil Engineer. The third of four children, he graduated from Lackawanna High School in 1978, and was accepted to Clarkson College to study engineering. Graduating in 1982, he was hired by the New York State Department of Transportation, where he worked until his retirement in 2016. During his career with the State, he worked in Design, Survey, and Construction where his jobs included Designer, Survey Crew Chief, Inspector, and Engineer-in-charge. He oversaw numerous projects, including the rebuilding of the Route 219 bridge over Cattaraugus Creek, Route 5 and Skyway reconstruction, and numerous other bridge reconstructions and rehabilitations, and paving projects. He was a licensed Professional Engineer and Land Surveyor.

Throughout his life, Bierut held an interest in industry and transportation. Growing up near the then-B&O (originally Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh Railway) mainline in Lackawanna, he studied the line's history, and collected numerous volumes of reports, surveys, and books on that railroad. His interest then expanded to other right-of-ways that intersected within a mile from his home: the Lehigh & Lake Erie Branch of the Lehigh Valley Railroad; New York Central's Terminal Railroad, and the Pennsylvania Railroad's West Seneca Branch.

In time, Bierut amassed an impressive collection of history concerning the region's railroads, which included: New York State Railroad Commissioner's Reports; Railway Age; Moody's and other valuation publications; and numerous histories about the area's trolley systems. He was an avid collector of railroad memorabilia and ephemera: lanterns, stock certificates, date nails, schedules, and timetables.

In addition to railroad and sea, air, and road transportation histories, Bierut's collection of over 1,500 books included works on American history; regional, state, U.S. and international law; woodworking; metalworking; photography; and countless other interests.

Bierut died in 2018, and his family wanted to see his books available to transportation historians. The collection was entrusted to longtime friend and historian Mark Kohan, who cataloged the volumes, and researched several organizations to find one best-suited to serve this purpose. Arrangements were made with Gregory W. Gerstung, vice president of the Niagara Frontier Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society to accept the books in Bierut's name and memory. They will be available to all researchers at their new home at the Railroad Museum of the Niagara Frontier in the library located in North Tonawanda, N.Y.

– submitted by Greg Gerstung

*Editor's note: this donation was received some months ago and is being integrated into the Chapter's library in the Station. We have outgrown both the original library and original Archive space and projects are underway to expand these spaces as more material is arriving. We have an already tremendous resource and it only has been getting better. The Chapter owes a debt of gratitude to the Bierut family for entrusting these historically priceless reference materials and other books in the care of our organization. These will be of immense value to current and future researchers wanting to tell the story of western New York's rich railroad heritage.*

## MARKERS – LAST RUN

We regret to report the passing of Nancy Nickerson, owner of D&R Depot in LeRoy, NY. The D&R Depot restaurant is located in the former Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh Ry. (later B&O) station. This classic building served the village for years until the demise of passenger service and luckily held on as railroad offices thru the early years of Conrail. The station's railroad themed decorations reflected Nancy's good taste; not too fussy, and getting the balance between artifacts and railroad photos just right. It is a gem of station re-use with the former waiting rooms serving as the dining areas. Your editor and several friends have often eaten at this establishment, a great finish to railfan trips when in the Rochester area. More information follows from the online Video News and The Daily News, Batavia, NY:



After 90 years of hard work and dedication, Nancy Nickerson entered into eternal rest on August 16, 2022 after a brief illness. She passed peacefully, surrounded by family and friends.

She was born Nancy Jean Reckahn on June 23, 1932 to Alvin E. and Mary M. (Moran) Reckahn. She spent the first part of her life growing up in Buffalo, New York, where she met Donald K.W. Nickerson and they were married from September 4, 1954 until his death on March 7, 2000.

For the second part of her life, Don & Nancy lived in East Bethany and raised five children, a lot of pets and a few gardens. She worked for 24 years at the Red Osier Landmark in Stafford. Nancy earned a reputation for work ethic there, starting as a waitress and retiring as the office manager, and taking only one sick day while doing it.

When most people would be planning for retirement, Nancy embarked on the third part of her life – Living her dream of owning her own restaurant. Armed with the many friendships she had made, and that unmatched work ethic, she and Don started the D&R Depot in LeRoy NY, in September of 1991. Somewhere in there the talented and just as hard-working Sean and Jennifer Valdez became her business partners, a relationship that would last for the rest of her life.

For the last 31 years, Nancy's life has centered around the restaurant. She loved to spend time with her grandkids, loved to travel, enjoyed reading, and community service, but she simply thrived at the Depot. That was what she had prepared most of her life to do, and she did it with gusto and with love (and some demanding standards). Every day was a chance to meet and greet so many old friends, so many new friends. Hospitality was her life, and she continued right to the end, being struck down while getting ready to go to work. That was Nancy.



JCD photo, August 21, 2022

## CHAPTER CALENDAR

- SEP 9**      **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center. Program by Aaron Heverin, digitized historic Chapter movie film assembled by Jim VanBrocklin.**
  
- OCT 14**    **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center.** Walter Simpson will discuss the subject of his latest book, *The Steam Locomotive Energy Story: How These Locomotives Used Energy and What Was Done to Make Them More Efficient*

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**THANK YOU**

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