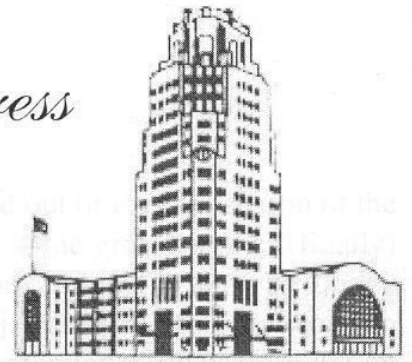


Empire State Express



FEBRUARY 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, February 9, 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.

THE RAILROAD STATION

February's program will draw upon material from the Chapter Archives. We are fortunate to have a slide program assembled by the now late Geoff Gerstung and presented by Becky Gerstung highlighting railway stations. Join us for a look at the buildings we love to visit as railroad historians!



Buffalo's beautiful new Exchange Street station opened to little fanfare during the Covid-19 Pandemic a few weeks before this photo was taken on November 14, 2020. *Photo by John C. Dahl.*



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Here we go again, where does the time go? It's going to be February by the time that you get this. We will be heading to the WNYRHS train show February 17th & 18th at the Fairgrounds. We always need help loading and unloading and setting up for these events. Contact Becky (716-434-5665) if you can help.

Anton Schwarzmüller and I were interviewed (via Zoom) on January 8th by James Levulis, WAMC Northeast Public Radio news anchor. The interview was for a podcast about the recently placed Pomeroy Foundation Historic Marker, the so called "Spy Marker". The podcast is called A New York Minute in History. We were contacted by Devin R. Lander, New York State Historian and Head of Museum Chartering, on the 3rd of January about doing this. Anton asked me to provide background on the organization which I was happy to do. Anton provided the background for the marker. Once it has been edited there will be a link to it posted so that all of you can hear the interview online. While we are on the topic of Historic Markers, we have the one for EL-2 on order with the foundry and expect delivery in March. Once it is installed, there will be a dedication ceremony to which you are all invited. We will advise date and time once it's finalized. And note: this marker will be serial number "1" in the new series dedicated to transportation. This is a unique honor for our organization!

We were the recipients of four beautiful display cases that came from the Clarence Historical Society. One had housed Jon Rothenmeyer's railroad exhibit there. Thanks to John Dahl for his donation to obtain the cabinets and for arranging the move. Plans are to reintroduce Jon's display into our building once we are a little more settled. There is still a lot of work going on in the center section of the Museum. The two wooden doors, E2 and E3, will be refurbished and the transom windows redone. The big white display case that housed the Niagara Junction display will be refurbished and moved across the aisle.

While we are talking about the Museum, we have published that it is open on the first Saturday of the month, every month through the winter and spring into our regular season. January 6th was the first day of this and we had several visitors. Once this is established, we can advertise that our museum is a year round attraction.

I am happy to report that the arrangements for the Chapter Banquet, scheduled for Saturday March 23rd have been finalized. **We will be in a new location so check the flyer.** The program will be Super Special! The "Lost Films of John Prophet", presented by Aaron Heverin. Again, check the flyer for more details, or look to our Facebook Page.

The following announcement is made out of necessity due to winter; should we need to cancel the monthly meeting because of the weather, look to the usual sources for information. On your TV, channel 2, on the radio WGR 550AM, Oldies 104.1FM and WYRK 106.5FM. We try to make the cancellation decision early enough to make the 5 pm broadcasts.

The Chapter 2024 Calendar has totally sold out! This is the first time in my memory that this has happened. Congratulation to the Committee for producing such a fine product. If you want to submit something for the 2025 calendar, I'm sure that the committee will gladly accept it for consideration. If your photo is used in the calendar, you get a free calendar! **So, you have sent in your membership renewal, right?** If you have, thank you! If you haven't, please do it right away. The membership committee will appreciate that very much. See you at the Meeting, or the Train Show or the Museum.

Jim Ball



Cabin Fever Train Ride

GO Train Round Trip From Niagara Falls, Ont. to Toronto

Saturday, February 10, 2024

- Depart Niagara Falls, Ont VIA / GO Station: 12:04pm
- Arrive Toronto Union Station: 2:24pm

- Depart Toronto Union Station: 5:03pm
- Arrive Niagara Falls, Ont VIA / GO Station: 7:23pm

**Round Trip Fare - \$10.00 CDN
(Approximately \$7.50 USD)**

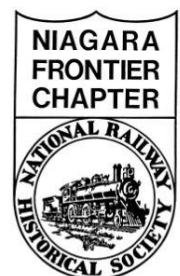
During The 2 1/2 Hour Layover...

*See The Recent Improvements At Toronto Union Station,
Enjoy A Snack In The New Food Court Or Take In A Ride On The TTC!*



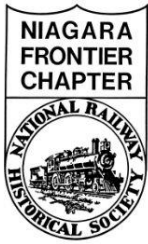
**Full Trip Information
& Registration
at www.nfcnrhs.org**

(Registration Required By February 8th)



NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER - NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Invites You To Their



84th ANNUAL BANQUET Saturday, March 23, 2024



**Unitarian Church Of Amherst Social Hall
6320 Main Street - Williamsville, NY 14221**



**11:30 am Beverages/Snacks - Silent Auction/50-50 - 12:15 pm Luncheon
Presentations & Program Following Lunch**

Buffet Style Luncheon

**Featuring Roast Beef, Turkey With Gravy, Baked Ziti, Mashed Potatoes, Vegetables, Coffee/Tea & Dessert
\$25.00 per person**



Banquet Program

The Lost Films Of John Prophet III

*Enjoy newly discovered films taken by noted
rail enthusiast John Prophet III between 1938 & 1941.*

Prepared & Presented by Aaron Heverin

Reservations must be received with full remittance no later than Saturday, March 16, 2024

Note: No tickets/confirmations will be mailed. You pick up your tickets at the door!

For more information call Nancy Andrycha at 716-442-5222



**Reservations By Credit/Debit Card
Are Available At www.nfcnrhs.org
Or By Scanning This QR Code**

Reservation Coupon - Niagara Frontier Chapter Annual Banquet March 23, 2024

Make Checks Payable To 'Niagara Frontier Chapter NRHS, Inc.' - \$_____ Total Enclosed

Mail With Full Payment To: Nancy Andrycha, 6915 Cedar Street, Akron, NY 14001-9669

Name(s) _____

Address _____ City, State, Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-Mail _____

DIAMONDS, TOWERS & RAILROAD JUNCTIONS IN THE TONAWANDAS – Part 1 **By John C. Dahl**

The 1949 hit song "Diamonds are a girl's best friend" may apply to Broadway shows and popular movies. However, in railroad parlance, a "diamond" can be a bit of a problem. When two railroad tracks must cross each other at grade, that is a "diamond". Proper control of such a crossing is vital to safe railway operations, and track maintenance of the crossing is another consideration. Tonawanda and its "twin" to the north once had a multitude of railway crossings with diamonds. Junctions too abounded among the several railroads which once-upon-a-timetable existed in the Twin Cities. With two or more lines converging, a junction or track connection was often desirable for operational and commercial interests. When you have diamonds and junctions, railroad interlocking towers to safely manage the crossing more often than not would need to be built. A look at a map of a century and more ago of the Tonawandas reveals several rail lines crossing each other at grade. Before New York Central relocated its tracks at the end of World War I and opened the new cutoff in late 1922, there were even a few more instances of diamonds.

Typically, when one railroad wished to cross another, whoever was there first enjoyed the best advantages as to right of way, traffic priority and maintenance of the crossing. The latter would often fall to the second party, but there were often a multitude of factors and unique situations were the order of the day. Shared responsibility was often the result.

In the collection of the Historical Society of the Tonawandas is an 1880's map showing the layout of early railroad tracks. Prior to 1865, Tonawanda was one village, on both sides of the Erie Canal even though it fell into two county jurisdictions. The north ward in Niagara County would later split off and incorporate as the City of North Tonawanda in 1897, while those wards south of the canal in Erie County would become the City of Tonawanda just after the turn of the 20th Century. The Erie Canal here is actually Tonawanda Creek, a natural waterway which was enlarged and utilized in lieu of having to dig a manmade canal between Tonawanda and Pendelton. Generally it runs east-west while railway tracks through the cities predominately run north-south. The New York Central's line was originally all at grade and located on the east side of Main Street and Webster Street through the business section of the village. Utilization of a public right of way was a common practice in the early days of railroading. Very early on, between the cross streets of Broad and Morgan, NYC's Niagara Falls line crossed a spur off of the NYC owned Canandaigua & Niagara Falls. This spur track headed due west towards the Niagara River and its multitude of lumber docks.

Another diamond would be needed on the old C&NF north of the canal near where it converged with NYC's main Niagara Falls line. It had to cross over NYC's Lockport branch whose tracks headed northeast towards the "Lock City". The North Tonawanda depot would be located in this general vicinity, while the lovely "steamboat Gothic" style Tonawanda station occupied a park like setting just on the edge of the business district. This building still stands today, exterior restored, and is the home of the Historical Society of the Tonawandas. Interestingly, on the north side, another early map indicates a turntable and an engine house in the same general vicinity as the station.

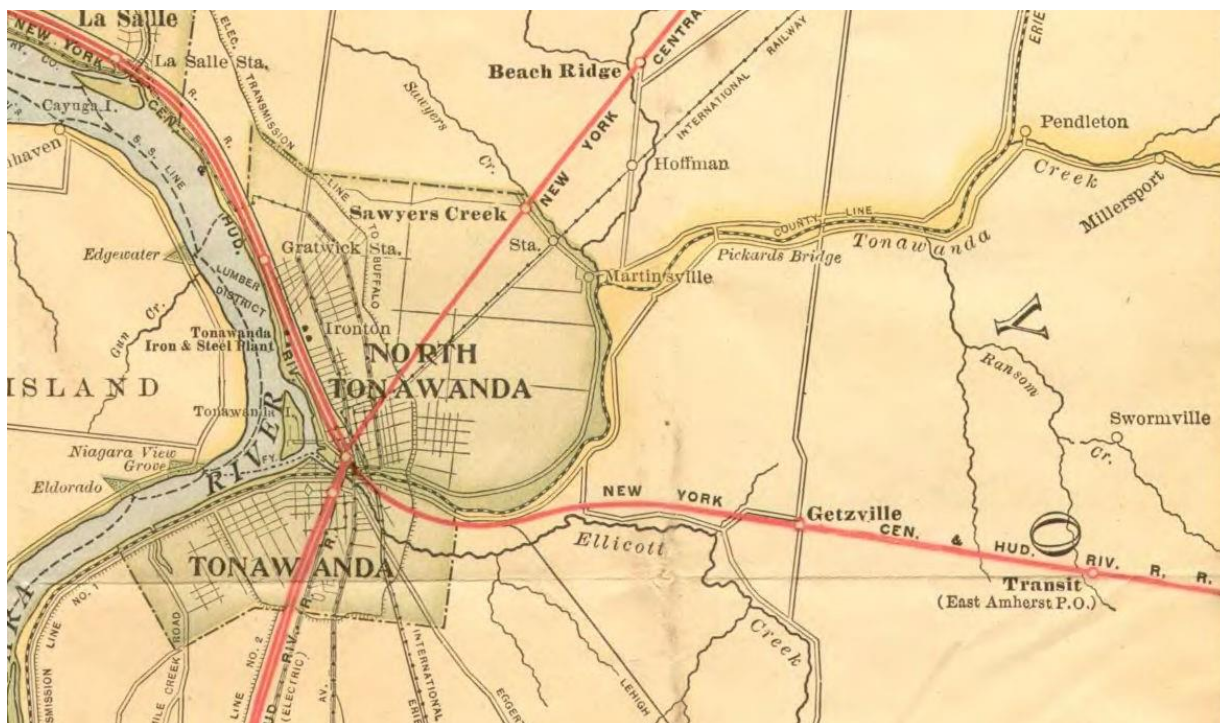
South of the canal, at Main and Young Streets, there stood a tower which controlled the single track segment of the line across the canal. By World War I, all traffic through the Tonawandas was a bottleneck and serious safety issue due to the numerous passenger and freight trains moving between Niagara Falls, Lockport and Buffalo on NYC. The State of New York announced plans to enlarge the old waterway into a "Barge canal" since steam powered tugs were now common and the days of mule hauled boats was fast receding into history. NYC was required to relocate its tracks and the current line was constructed east of the business section on an elevated right of way. After track relocation was completed, the old tower was quickly removed and the east sides of Main and Webster Streets were opened to commercial development.

DIAMONDS – continued

Tower Erie 3 located in Tonawanda's Gastown section, controlled NYC's Canandaigua branch (also known as The Peanut) as it crossed over the Erie RR's Niagara Falls and Suspension Bridge branch. The C&NF was built first, but at the time of track construction, the company was affiliated with the Erie RR. A six-foot gauge was originally utilized! The much-maligned Erie was a victim of those "robber barons" so common in 19th Century railroading. The Erie lost control of the C&NF, and New York Central eagerly scooped up the property to eliminate potential competition. At that time, NYC's Dean Richmond is said to have called it a "mere peanut of a line", and thus the Peanut nickname was born. NYC quickly converted the C&NF to standard gauge while the Erie would linger on with its unique wide gauge for a few more years.

The Erie 3 tower in Tonawanda and Erie 2 in North Tonawanda owe their existence to a tragic accident of May 26, 1911. A southbound International Railway maintenance train with two flatcars of ties struck a northbound Lehigh Valley passenger train at the then unmanned crossing (which became Erie 3). IRC leased one of the Erie's main line tracks between Buffalo and North Tonawanda and on into Lockport. Lehigh Valley utilized a short bit of the Peanut west from Tonawanda Jct. to NYC's Niagara Falls line. Shortly after the wreck, a meeting in Buffalo saw the NYC, Erie and IRC agree to build the Erie 2 tower with derails to prevent a direct collision of opposing trains. The Erie 2 location, with tracks crossing almost within the right of way of Oliver Street received priority. Erie 2 would later be designated EL2 after the Erie and Delaware, Lackawanna & Western merged in 1960. That structure is the very last railroad interlocking tower in the immediate Buffalo area and today has been preserved and will soon receive a railway historic marker.

Another crossing of note, on New York Central in North Tonawanda, tower 59 controlled the old Erie's "dock line" which headed west to serve the once numerous lumber loading docks along the Niagara River. This spur line was once heavily trafficked especially during the days of the Tonawanda Iron Works. As a kid, my dad would drive my brother and I over to watch the plant switcher moving cars of hot slag across River Road to the dumping area where the hot molten waste would spill on the ground in a red cascade of sparks and flame.



Excerpt of 1904 map of the Niagara Frontier showing Tonawanda & North Tonawanda.
Author's collection.

DIAMONDS – continued

We will continue the story of “DIAMONDS, TOWERS & RAILROAD JUNCTIONS IN THE TONAWANDAS” in the next ESX.



Tower Erie 3 in Tonawanda, looking north towards the canal bridge. The NYC/LVRR “Peanut line” crosses left to right behind the tower. Circa 1955. *Eric Schmelz collection.*

ON THE TRACK AHEAD



March will feature some historic photos from The Milwaukee Road. Bruce Becker has arranged to show us a collection originally produced on glass plate negatives that date back more than 100 years to the era of “magic lantern” shows! This will be a unique view of railroading and photographic technology of the golden era.

CHAPTER CALENDAR

- FEB 9** **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. The RR Station. Material from the Chapter Archives presented by Becky Gerstung.**
- FEB 10** **GO TRAIN winter cabin fever trip to Toronto. See flyer on page 3.**
- FEB 17-18** **Winter Train Show. WNYRHS at the Hamburg Fairgrounds. 10 am-5 pm. Chapter table needs volunteers.**
- MAR 8** **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. The Milwaukee Road as seen in historic photos from original glass plate negatives. Presented by Bruce Becker.**
- MAR 23** **Chapter Banquet, Williamsville Unitarian Church, Luncheon 11:30 AM. Program: Aaron Heverin will present "The Lost Films of John Prophet". See flyer on page 4 in this issue of ESX.**

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 nfcnrhs@gmail.com THANK YOU

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