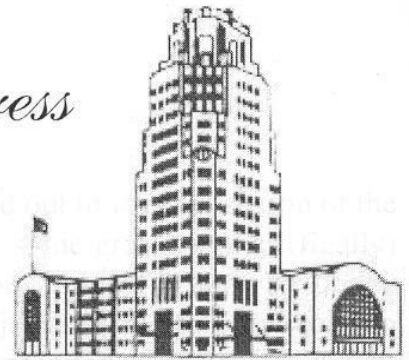


Empire State Express



MARCH 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, March 8, 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.

'Safety Training On The Milwaukee Road In 1914'

*A Program Of Historic Images From The Original Glass Slides
Presented By Chapter Member Bruce Becker*

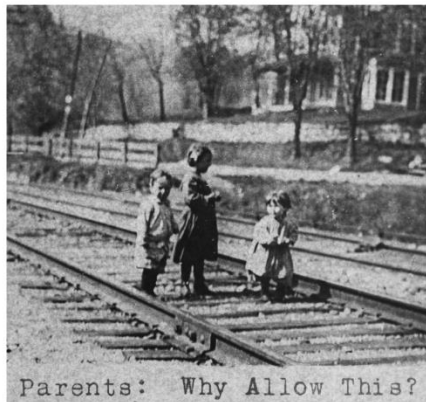
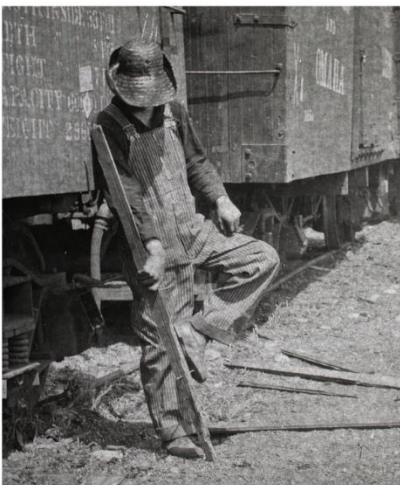
Railroading has always been dangerous!

In March we take a look at how
The Milwaukee Road worked to prevent
accidents, injuries & death!



Employees killed & injured on the Railroads
of the United States during the year ending
June 30, 1913.

Killed	- - - - -	3,715
Injured	- - - - -	171,417



A man working in one of the shops got something in his eye.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



On February 10th a group of 16 Chapter Members, friends and family, drove to Niagara Falls, Ontario and boarded the GO Transit train #1970 and departed at 12:04 pm for Toronto. After enjoying the hospitality of metro Toronto they boarded train 1977 and departed Toronto at 5:03 pm for home. Unfortunately, I was under the weather that day, but reports are that it was a great trip. Thanks to Bruce Becker for arranging it.

We participated in the WNYRHS train show February 17th & 18th at the Fairgrounds. It was a good networking event. We sold enough “stuff” to pay for the tables and it gave us some good exposure in the Southtowns. Thanks to Becky, Greg, Steve, Bruce, Bob & Nancy and M. J. Lewandowski and Dan Sikorski for their help. A special thanks to Greg for the use of his truck.

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, as was reported last month. The podcast can be heard at

[Confederate Spies at the Canadian Border | William G. Pomeroy Foundation \(wgpfoundation.org\)](https://www.wgpfoundation.org/media/confederate-spies-at-the-canadian-border/)

<https://www.wgpfoundation.org/media/confederate-spies-at-the-canadian-border/>

While we are talking about the Museum, we will be, by the time that you read this, three months into our new schedule. 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.

As of this writing, we do not yet have a schedule for the unveiling of the marker for EL-2. As soon as the arrangements are finalized, we will publicize it.

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.

Plans are being formulated to march in the North Tonawanda Dyngus Day Parade. The parade will be on Monday April 1st. We are also looking at being in the Canal Fest parade with a float.

Let us hope that the following announcement is made for the last time until next 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.

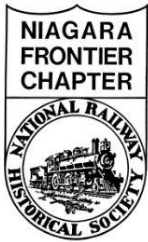
So, you have sent in your membership renewal, right? If you have, great, thank you! If you haven't, please do it right away. The membership chairman, Neal Kerin, will appreciate that very much.

See you at the Meeting, or at the Museum.

Jim Ball

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 2

By John C. Dahl

The Twin Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda once had a number of electric trolley lines. In June 1918 the International Railway Company opened a new route from Buffalo to Niagara Falls, supplanting earlier lines which incorporated traditional street trolley car routes. The IRC itself was an amalgamation of several smaller companies in the greater Buffalo and Niagara Falls area and grew out of the ready availability of electricity from Niagara Falls. By shortly after the turn of the 20th Century, electricity was big business, placing Buffalo among the forefront of American cities. Electricity was the center of attention at the 1901 Pan American Exposition held in Buffalo. The IRC's new route was called the 'High Speed Line' and as the name implies, it had frequent, swift service from downtown to downtown. Largely grade separated and double tracked, it was on the cutting edge of early 20th Century railroading. At one point, there was a proposal for a parallel electrified freight line and indeed, many bridge abutments were constructed with stepped concrete wing walls to accommodate the future line. Of course it was never built, but it points out the tremendous amount of rail traffic that was being handled by the railroads and the planning for additional capacity that was done over 100 years ago.

The route north from Buffalo followed the Erie Railroad's Suspension Bridge and Niagara Falls branch for much of the way through the Town of Tonawanda and then again north through Wheatfield and into Niagara Falls, while in the Twin Cities the right of way diverted to the eastern outskirts of the city limits. Travel times between Niagara Falls and Buffalo was one hour, comparable to or even better than today's driving on Interstate 190 with no traffic or road construction bottlenecks to deal with and considering that 30 minutes alone was consumed on the street running portion of the line on Buffalo's Main Street. In North Tonawanda, the High Speed line was located where today's Twin Cities Expressway is situated. Falls Junction, located on the east side of the City of Tonawanda was where the High Speed and the Erie RR right of way came together.

A tragic fatal wreck on the High Speed on October 19, 1924 occurred at the Ellicott Creek Station in Tonawanda when two three-car trains collided. The IRC had some older wooden cars, utilized on popular excursion days when traffic was especially heavy. A train had made an emergency stop at the station platform but was rammed by a following three-car train. Two of the cars were badly telescoped. More than a dozen persons were killed and many more injured. The operator of the following train had seen the stopped train ahead but assumed it was on the other track. By the time he recognized his mistake, it was too late to check the train's speed. This wreck effectively ended the use of wooden cars for excursions and the NY Public Service Commission ordered the installation of a block signal system from Main Street in Buffalo to Niagara Falls.

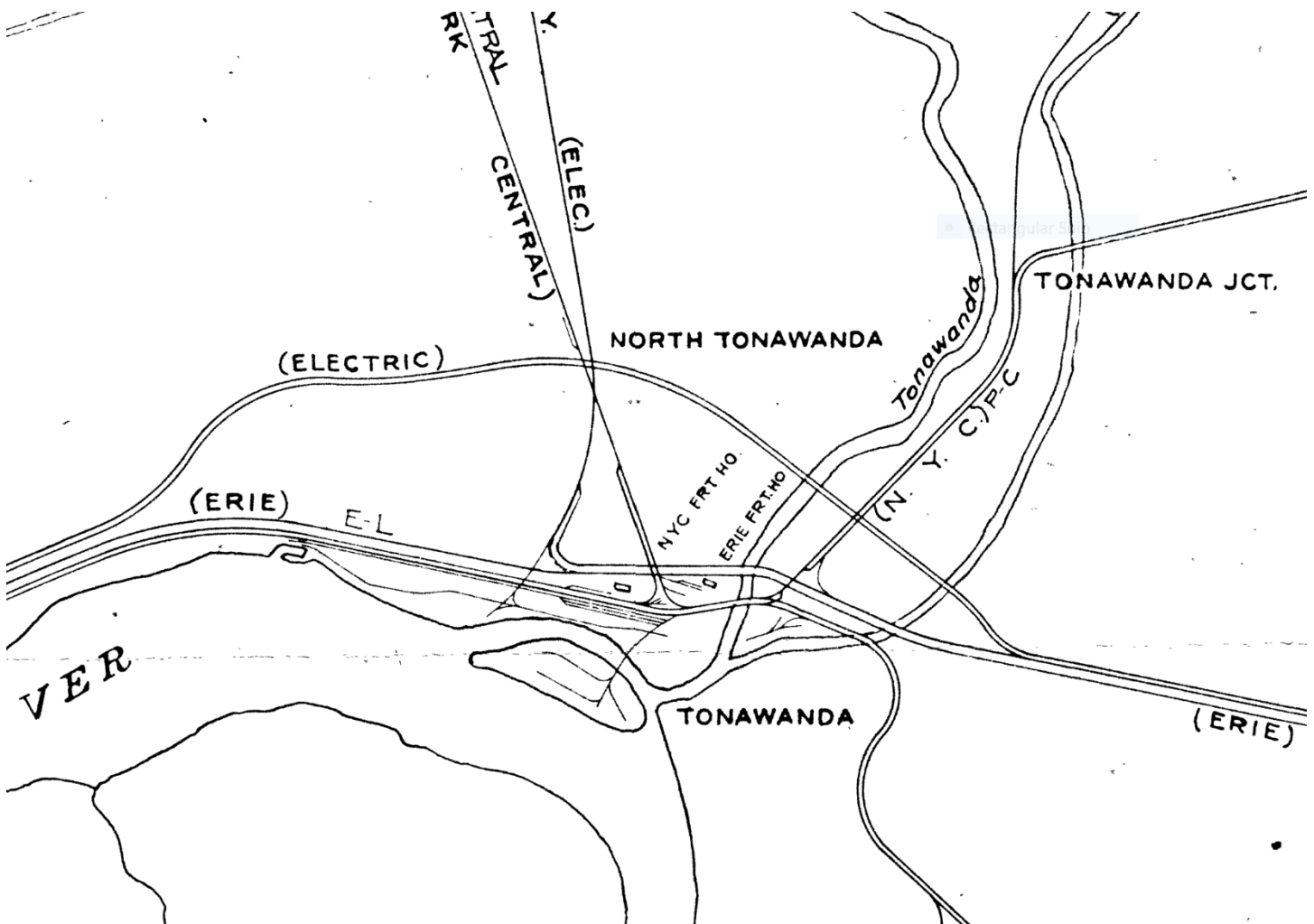
With the Great Depression of the 1930's and the rise of the private automobile, abandonment of the High Speed was inevitable. A farewell trip over the line was operated in 1937 during the very early years of the Rochester Chapter, NRHS and no doubt some future members of the Railway Enthusiasts, Buffalo Division, which itself became our Chapter, were among those who participated.

Tower Erie 1, which had interlocking levers and mechanical semaphore signals was located in North Tonawanda where the Erie's Lockport Branch crossed the New York Central's Lockport Branch. Today this area has greatly changed and while a bit of the former Erie track is still there serving a few customers, the old NYC line is long gone. Several knowledgeable folks have said this tower was not manned by a full-time operator.

Another crossing of note was Payne Avenue Junction. Here the Lockport trolley of the IRC crossed Payne Avenue with its city streetcar route on the Avenue, a part of the former Buffalo & Niagara Falls Electric Railway that IRC previously absorbed. A waiting room was located here for the convenience of patrons. The

DIAMONDS – continued

trolley was abandoned on Payne Avenue by 1922. The Erie's freight branch to Lockport was located parallel to the IRC. IRC had leased and electrified one of the Erie's original two tracks of the Lockport branch for its use and in later years electric freight locomotives on the Erie provided service to industries before diesels took over.



Above: Excerpt from map E-00-42 showing the Twin Cities. The drawing appears to have been last updated for Penn Central in 1968. Larry Gustina collection. The full map is also in our NFC Archives and is on display in the museum. It is a fascinating overview of Buffalo and Niagara Falls area railroads.

Lastly in our study of railway junctions of old in the Twin Cities, Tonawanda Junction was the once upon a timetable location where the Lehigh Valley's branch from Depew joined New York Central's Canandaigua Branch. Popularly nicknamed "The Peanut", the former Canandaigua & Niagara Falls dated to the early 1850's and was in its formative years affiliated with the Erie Railroad. It is about 100 miles from Canandaigua to Niagara Falls, and it was seen as a way for the Erie via its affiliated line from Elmira to Canandaigua to get to the Falls and within a few years, beyond to Suspension Bridge. Thus, it adopted the Erie's wide, 6 foot gauge! The New York Central, wary of any encroachment on what it viewed as its domain, quickly scooped up the line when inevitably the Erie and its tangled financial arrangements faltered in bankruptcy. NYC Vice President Dean Richmond is said to have coined the nickname for the railroad, referring to it as a 'mere peanut of a line'. The name stuck. New York Central wasted no time and quickly converted the track to standard gauge.

DIAMONDS – continued



From Tonawanda Junction, the Lehigh Valley RR shared with NYC on trackage rights all the way to Niagara Falls and north to Suspension Bridge. While the junction did not feature a diamond or a full wye, it was still an important place. The Lehigh Valley was among the latecomers to Buffalo, and its branch from Depew to Tonawanda was not completed until 1896. But it functioned as intended, bypassing freight congestion in Buffalo allowing the LV to speed coal and merchandise traffic to and from the Canadian gateway at Suspension Bridge. The double track LV ran northwest from Depew via Williamsville on a mostly grade separated route and a second track was added to that portion of the Peanut from Tonawanda Junction west to the Central's Niagara Falls branch. A two-story LV style wood interlocking tower was constructed. Our museum has a full-sized replica of the Tonawanda Junction sign which once adorned this tower.

The tower only existed a few years as photographic documentation is sparse (photo above). By the early 1920s, a single level switch shanty located a few hundred feet west had replaced the tower, housing the control levers for a crossover and related semaphore signals at the junction with the switch to the old Peanut. These upper quadrant signals replaced some earlier lower quadrant style devices and were still in service in the late 1950s and early 1960s when I began my youthful observations of LVRR trains highballing around the curve headed east and westbound. Those trains were long and seemed to me to be quite fast! Strings of boxcars, oily tank cars, and coal hoppers from all of the now vanished classic railroad names of old rolled past my lookout spot in my grandparent's backyard which adjoined the old switch shanty.

Remarkably this structure still exists today, having been repurposed as a garden shed by the current owner of the home my grandfather built in 1955. It had been in poor to decrepit condition for years, nearly engulfed by wild grape vines and other underbrush that took over when the Lehigh Valley was abandoned with the coming of Conrail in 1976. Our own Chapter ran what are believed to be the last ever passenger / railfan excursions on the west end of the Peanut, one in 1946 when Russ Shapley was still president of the group and another in 1948 which was part of the village of Akron, NY centennial celebrations. A 1926 NYC timetable shows a 'motorcar' service on the line east of Batavia. Both the 1946 and 1948 trips featured steam locomotives. Service between Tonawanda and Getzville ended by about 1953 and the rails were torn up for scrap. In several places even as late as the 1970's, one could see the wooden ties along the right of way, and my dad, brother and I went tie datenail hunting one fine early spring day. It is a memory I now cherish, and I still have the nice collection of these datenails. It is evident that the Central did quite a bit of maintenance on this portion of the Peanut in the early 1920s.

The once upon a timetable diamonds and towers and the railroads that operated them are but memories now in the Tonawandas. Your Chapter is fortunate to be the custodian of EL-2 and the nearby former Erie RR freight house. EL-2 is the last of what were once dozens of towers throughout the Buffalo and Niagara Falls area. Railway technology moved on and the tower has been relegated to history. Come visit EL-2 and the station museum where you will find a wealth of photographic and historical artifacts of railroading in not only the Tonawandas but also of the greater Buffalo and Niagara Frontier region.

Information, book, photo, map sources and acknowledgements: Larry Gustina, Steve Kocsis, Bob Andrycha, Greg Gerstung; History of Railroads in Western New York, Fr. Edward Dunn, SJ, 90 Years of Buffalo Railways, William R. Gordon; Trolley Days in the Tonawandas, Robert H. Lloyd

LAST RUN

The Chapter lost long time member Lamar S. Todd (1938-2024) in early February. He was a regular on many Chapter trips in the years when Al Kerr and others organized and ran some very memorable and successful excursions on Canadian trains as well as Amtrak. Lamar was a faithful attendee at meetings and Chapter banquets until recent years when health issues sadly curtailed his activities. The Chapter extends its sincere condolences to his wife Marilyn and family.

ON THE TRACK AHEAD



April is Devan Lawton month for our meeting program! Details will be forthcoming, but as always we look forward to Devan's railroader's view of things "on the property". Mark your calendar now for the April meeting, Friday April 12th, 2024.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

A historian's job is never done. While researching data for my article on DIAMONDS, TOWERS & RAILROAD JUNCTIONS IN THE TONAWANDAS, I found there are at least two "Tonawanda Junction" locations! The NYC/LVRR is described earlier in this issue of ESX. But a May 11, 1908 NYC&HR Employee timetable map also shows a "Tonawanda Jct." in North Tonawanda where its Lockport branch left the Niagara branch, very close to the location of the Central's North Tonawanda passenger station. I recall also seeing a reference to a "Tonawanda Jct." in north Buffalo on the IRC. So, at the very least, one needs to be careful when referring to this place to get the correct context.

WATERLOO CENTRAL ACQUIRES ex-CPR STEAM LOCOMOTIVE 1238

A press announcement December 28, 2023 details that former Canadian Pacific steam locomotive 1238, class G5, a 4-6-2 Pacific built by the Montreal Locomotive Works in 1946 will be restored to operating condition for use on the Waterloo (Ontario) Central. The full press release can be found at <http://waterloocentralrailway.com>. Fundraising is now underway and hopefully in the not-too-distant future we will be able to venture north of the border to once again savor the majesty that was Canadian Pacific steam!

Thanks to John Freyseng for forwarding this news.



A RARE SURVIVING NYC PEANUT LINE DEPOT

The groundhog predicted an early spring and indeed up to now with a few exceptions it has been a mild winter. But just in case Mother Nature does not cooperate in the next few weeks, here is a view of the old Peanut Line New York Central depot at Ionia, NY last May 6, 2023 with spring truly in full bloom! The old depot is now a private home but is still recognizable as a once upon a timetable railway structure. John C. Dahl photo.

CHAPTER CALENDAR

- MAR 8** **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. 1914 Safety Training on the Milwaukee Road, historic photos 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 3 in this issue of ESX. RESERVATION DEADLINE MARCH 16.**

- APR 12** **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center, 7 PM. Program by Devan Lawton.**

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 nfcrhs@gmail.com THANK YOU

The Empire State Express is mailed free to all members of the Niagara Frontier Chapter NRHS, Inc. Anyone who is not a Chapter / NRHS member may receive *The Empire State Express* by mail. Please contact the Chapter at PO Box 1043, North Tonawanda, NY 14120 for current membership and subscription rate details.



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED DATED MATERIAL - PLEASE EXPEDITE

The Empire State Express
 NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER NRHS, INC.
 POST OFFICE BOX 1043
 NORTH TONAWANDA, NY 14120