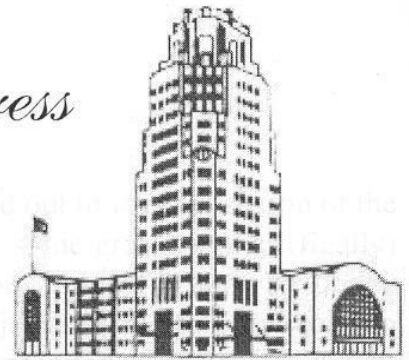


# *Empire State Express*



**FEBRUARY 2023**

PUBLICATION OF THE NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER NRHS, INC.

Editor: John C. Dahl    Email [nfcnrhs@gmail.com](mailto:nfcnrhs@gmail.com)

The meeting of the Chapter is scheduled for Friday, February 10, 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.

## **SOME HISTORIC SLIDES FROM OUR ARCHIVES**

Your Chapter archive is the repository for several thousand 35 mm slides. Many of these have been donated as part of former members collections when they passed on. Greg Gerstung has been sorting, indexing, and digitizing some of these over the past several years and it is from this work in progress that we will view a sampling of what is in the collection. The early Buffalo Chapter and now our present Niagara Frontier Chapter has been fortunate to count among its members some of the greatest railroad photographers that ever lived. Come see some treasures of railroading's past which are in the archive!



*ESX cover: Steam locomotives were fast fading from Buffalo by the second half of the 1950s, but in an instance of true glory, we see Nickel Plate Berkshire # 744, westbound at GB block station, Blasdell, NY, in March 1957 with hot merchandise in tow behind the tender. James A. Van Brocklin photo, Niagara Frontier Chapter, NRHS Archives.*

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



There is a whole lot going on this first quarter of 2023. In the past, we would hunker down and wait out the worst of the winter. Last year we made a concerted effort to work on Saturdays through the first quarter. We did get a lot done. We are working through the processing of three major collections that we received last year. Greg Gerstung spends hours looking at films and cataloging them. Many boxes of slides still await his attention.

Becky Gerstung spends many hours working in the Archive Room. She has organized boxes and boxes of photographs, placing them in archival quality sleeves and into binders according to railroad. Each one is labeled and documented. Where there are questions, she submits it to the group to research.

Work continues on the many other projects at the Museum. This winter we are rehabbing the lady's restroom. Ben Hiltz has removed the wood dividers from there which will open up the room. Bob Andrycha will be repainting that room. We will be replacing the commode with a new, modern one which will be ADA compliant.

Ben Hiltz and Steve Frey have cleaned up and organized the north end. It has never been so tidy in all the years that we have owned the station.

We got through our first month of having the ESX printed by our new provider Pioneer Printing. They seem to be doing a good job for us. There were very few glitches, and we hope the process continues to go smoothly in the future. Please let us know if you don't get your ESX in good order and on time.

Tired of staying in because of the weather? Join us as we go for a train ride on February 11 to Toronto and back. Details are enclosed on the next page and also on our Facebook page. We will be going to the WNYRHS Train Show at the Hamburg Fairgrounds, February 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup>. We are looking forward to seeing a lot of your familiar faces there.

Coming up we have our Annual Luncheon Banquet at Ilio Di Paolos Restaurant on March 18<sup>th</sup>. The price is the same as last year. That doesn't happen much these days. Get your reservations in to Nancy Andrycha right away. It's going to be a great day.

There are two situations that are playing out in the background of our flurry of activity. First, Anton Schwarzmuller has been working the process toward putting our tower, EL-2, on the National Register of Historic Places. In gathering some documentation for that, we found a much clearer survey of the property. The deed is dated December of 1997.

The second item is the loan of some thirty audio tapes and movie films made by John M. Prophet III to the Chapter. These were willed to the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania by John himself. We, as a 501 C 3 Museum, will be allowed to borrow them for the purpose of digitizing these. This will be overseen by Aaron Heverin. (Check out Aaron's previous transcriptions of several of John's sound recordings online at Living With Steam. A link to this is on our website.)

All the while we are in winter mode, we continue to have visitors. It seems every Saturday since the holiday someone or several people have come to the door asking to come in and see the place. We even had a gentleman visiting from Italy call and ask to come through. Greg Gerstung gave him the platinum tour!

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

*Jim Ball*



# **Cabin Fever Train Ride**

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

### **Saturday, February 11, 2023**

- **Depart Niagara Falls, Ont VIA / GO Station: 1:10pm**
- **Arrive Toronto Union Station: 3:18pm**
  
- **Depart Toronto Union Station: 5:07pm**
- **Arrive Niagara Falls, Ont VIA / GO Station: 7:13pm**

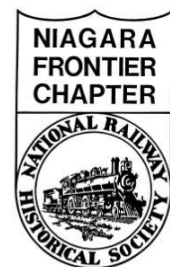
**Round Trip Fare - \$10.00 CDN  
(Approximately \$7.50 USD)**

*During The 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!*



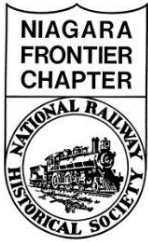
**Full Trip Information  
& Registration  
at [www.nfcnrhs.org](http://www.nfcnrhs.org)**  
(Registration Required By February 8th)





# NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER - NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Invites You To Their*



## 83rd ANNUAL BANQUET Saturday, March 18, 2023



**Ilio Di Paolo's Restaurant  
3785 South Park Ave - Blasdell, NY 14219**



**11:30 am Cash Bar - 12:15 pm Luncheon - Silent Auction/50-50 - Program Following**

### **The Family Style Luncheon**

**Will Feature Roast Beef & Sliced Turkey, With Penne Pasta, Potatoes, Vegetables, Coffee/Tea & Dessert.**

**\$30.00 per person**



### **Banquet Program**

### ***The 1941 Fan Trips***

*of the*

### ***Railroad Enthusiasts - Buffalo Chapter***

***Enjoy newly discovered film scenes from trips on the  
New York, Ontario & Western, DL&W, Erie, Lehigh Valley,  
Coudersport & Port Allegany & New York Central!***

**Reservations must be received with full remittance no later than Friday March 4, 2022**

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

For information call Nancy Andrycha at 716-442-5222 or Becky Gerstung 716-434-5665.



**Reservations By Credit/Debit Card  
Are Available At [www.nfcnrhs.org](http://www.nfcnrhs.org)**

---

### **Reservation Coupon - Niagara Frontier Chapter Annual Banquet March 18, 2023**

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

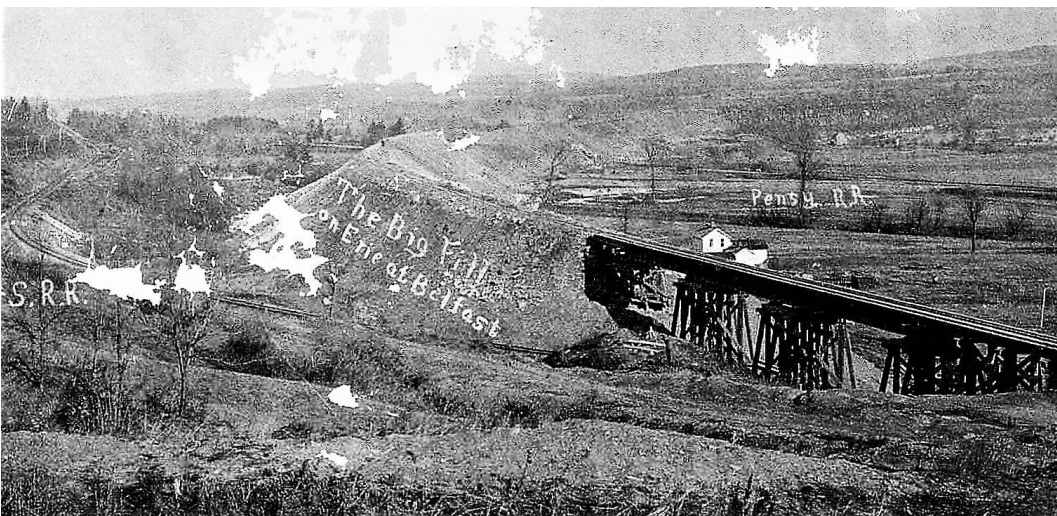
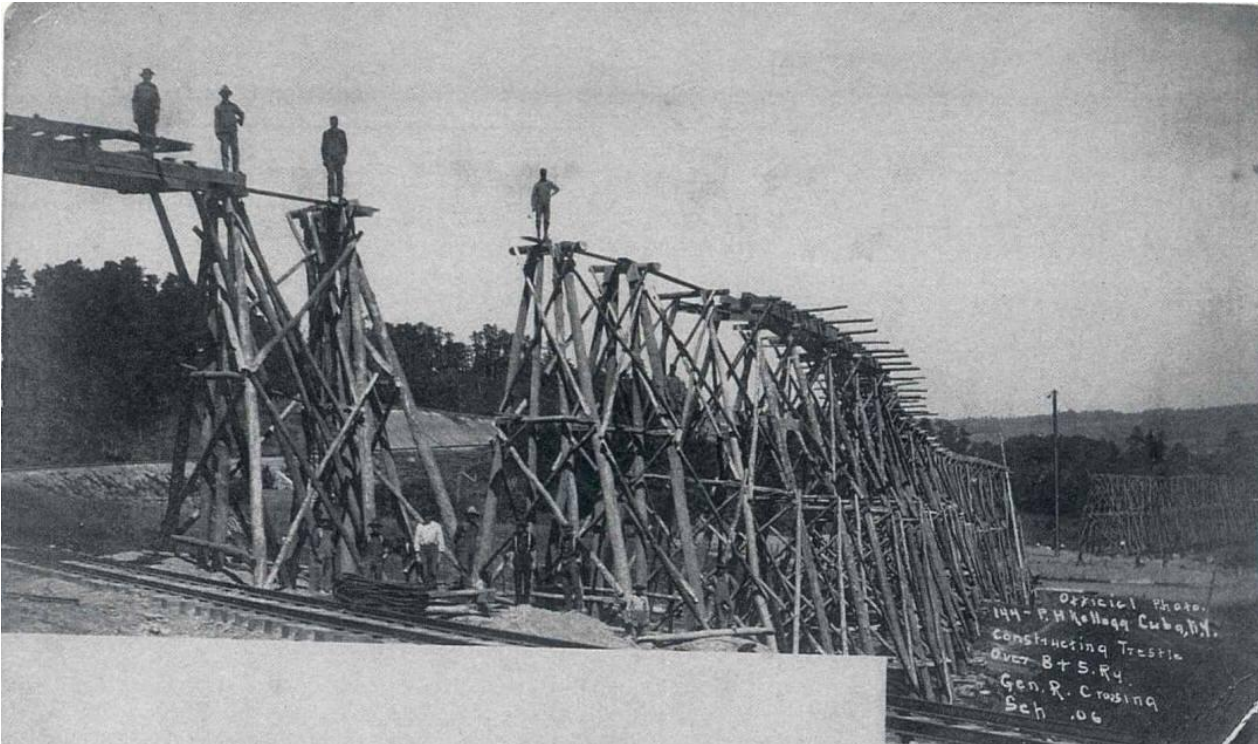
**Name(s)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_ **City, State, Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-Mail** \_\_\_\_\_

## THE GENESEE RIVER RAILROAD - Part 3

By: Tony Schill



FILL TRESTLES ON THE WESTERN APPROACH TO THE GENESEE RIVER VIADUCT

Between this bridge and the 66-foot-high concrete abutment at the west end of the actual viaduct there were two tunnels through the fill. One was for a public highway and the other was for the PRR's Rochester Branch. Some years later, in 1922, the 226 ft. PRR tunnel developed very serious cracks that compromised its structural integrity. The Pensy then built a bypass which curved to the east, passed under the west end of the Genesee River Viaduct itself, then curved back to the west to re-join the PRR alignment.

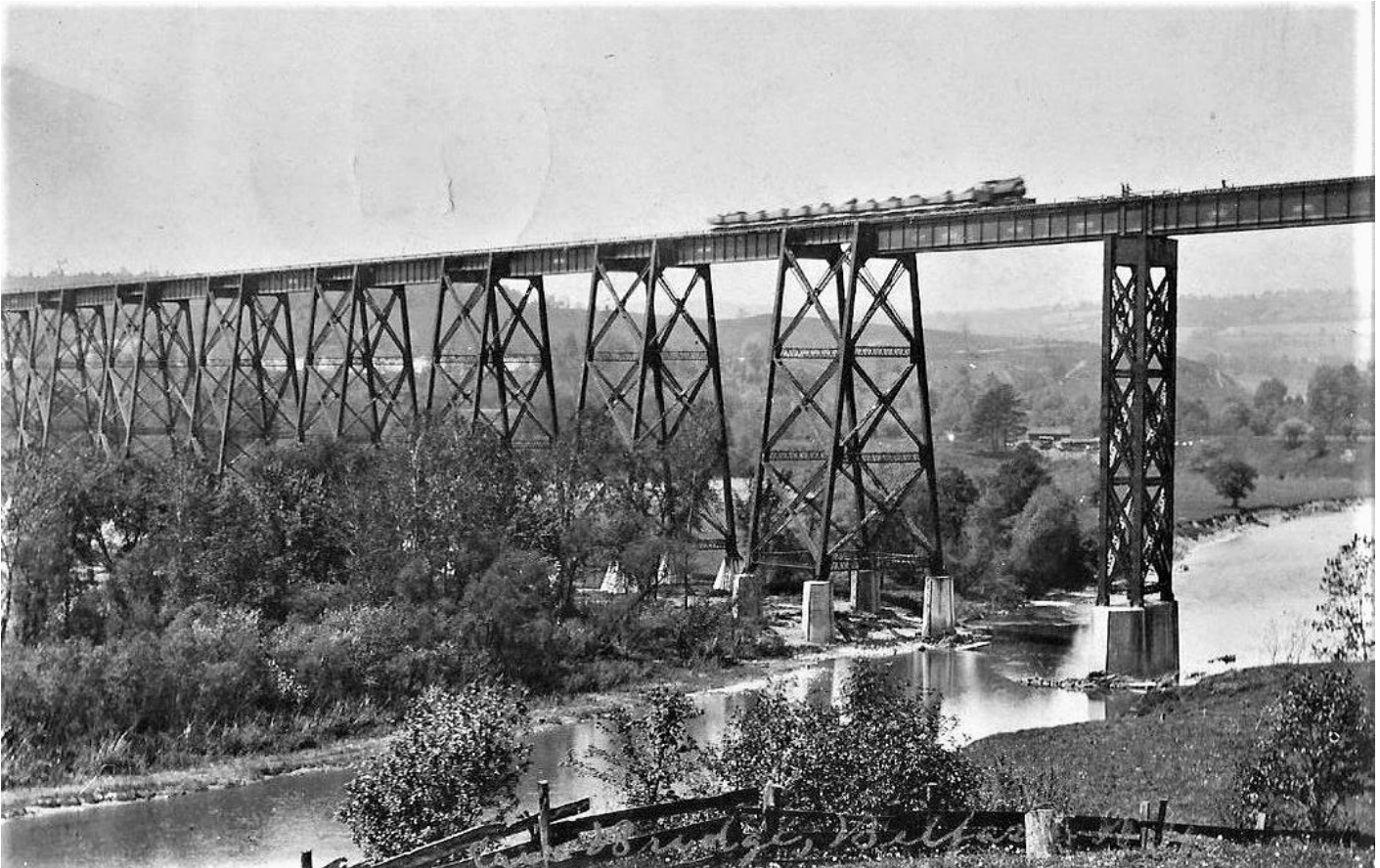
The Genesee River Viaduct included 3,600 tons of steel and 11,000 cubic yards of concrete. The west abutment took 1,200 cubic yards of the total. Design and construction of the steelwork was more or less the same as for Rush Creek Viaduct, except that over the Genesee River there were two 120 ft. deck plate-girder spans resting on a particularly heavy tower which in turn was founded on piles in the river. Here again the viaduct was



## THE GENESEE RIVER RR - continued

designed to facilitate future expansion to double track, but such expansion never occurred. Both viaducts were similar in design to the previously completed and still-extant Moodna Viaduct (east of Port Jervis, NY) on the Erie's Graham (aka Guymard) cut-off. Beyond the west end of the great fill and along Black Creek the remaining work to Cuba Junction was much easier, and there were no major engineering issues.

The Genesee River Railroad was opened to service on October 1, 1910, and it instantly justified its construction by significantly reducing operating cost and greatly helping the Erie to achieve its wide reputation as the "Fast Freight Route" between the New York City area and Chicago.



The Genesee River Railroad was formally incorporated into the Erie itself in 1914, and for the next 63 years it was the normal route for all through freight trains between Cuba Jct. and Hornell that did not have work at intermediate points. No passenger trains were ever scheduled to operate on this line, as all such trains stopped at Wellsville, an important city. Moreover, any improvement in passenger train running time by using the GRRR line would still have been insufficient to make the Erie time-competitive between New York, Cleveland and Chicago. On occasion, passenger trains did operate over the new line, but only when they could not use the original route for any reason.

In 1960 the Erie, by then in a greatly weakened state, merged with former rival Lackawanna (which itself was suffering from the precipitous decline of the anthracite coal industry.) The E-L struggled through the next 16 years, after which it became part of Conrail. Conrail also inherited the two busy New York-Chicago main lines of the Penn Central (ex- New York Central and Pennsylvania), both of which (unlike the Erie) served major intermediate cities.

## THE GENESEE RIVER RR - continued



Going over bridge in Belfast, N.Y.

As a result, Conrail considered the Erie main line to be redundant as an inferior through route, and began diverting its traffic to ex-Penn Central routes. Very soon mostly only local freights used the Erie line. In due course the Erie main In Ohio and Indiana began to be abandoned or sold to short lines. New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania fared somewhat better, and today nearly all the entire ex-Erie main lines between Jersey City, Buffalo and Youngstown, OH remain in some degree of use.

The volume of freight traffic on the former Erie main lines is extremely variable. At the low end there is a train perhaps once a week each way between Jamestown, NY and Corry, PA. At the other extreme (in terms of freight) there is the NS line between Buffalo and Binghamton, which sees multiple trains a day each way. Elsewhere there is a train each way on most days between Olean and Salamanca on the Western New York & Pennsylvania, and another train two or three days a week between Olean and Jamestown and also on the WNY&P between Corry and Meadville, PA. West from Meadville, NS operates a local three days a week.

The volume of freight traffic on the former Erie main lines is



The section eastward from Olean to Hornell is mostly dormant and is currently used for car storage, and the interchange with NS at Hornell has been closed. NS does have rights between Hornell and Meadville, and perhaps a decade or so ago was operating coal trains over the entire line on a semi-regular basis.

East of Binghamton to Port Jervis, including the famous Starrucca Viaduct and the Gulf Summit Grade, the old Erie main usually sees about three trains each way per week, all operated by the New York, Susquehanna & Western. From Port Jervis

eastward, there are also many New Jersey Transit commuter trains.

But the list of remaining Erie lines does not include the Genesee River Railroad. Over the years immediately before the Conrail takeover what had become the Erie's "River Line" had experienced deferred maintenance



## THE GENESEE RIVER RR - continued

and track/right of way conditions had seriously deteriorated as a result. In 1977 a difficult-to-access derailment occurred and while it was cleaned up, Conrail decided to immediately end any use of the River Line.

In truth, Conrail really had no actual need for the River Line in any case. With diesels, the steep grades on the old main line over Tip Top were no longer a serious issue. In addition, now there were fewer and fewer trains running over the Erie anyway, so just a single track was just fine. There was simply no good reason for Conrail to sink big bucks into fixing the results of deferred maintenance.

However, what Conrail did not want was for the ex-Erie main to somehow get into the hands of any major competing railroad. If a new owner took over, the ex-Erie might start sucking traffic from the ex-NYC and PRR lines of Conrail, and might even resurrect the River Line. Indeed, there were some rumors of interest by CSX and also the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie in the ex-Erie main, but in the end, it was just talk. Trains never again used the River Line and even the original main line over Tip Top saw much less use.



The River Line sat unused for a couple years. Inevitably the track and right-of-way further deteriorated to the point that restoring it to service would require very significant expenditures to get it into shape.



Then in 1980-81 Conrail pulled the plug for good by taking up the rails and tearing down the great viaducts. And that was it for the River Line.



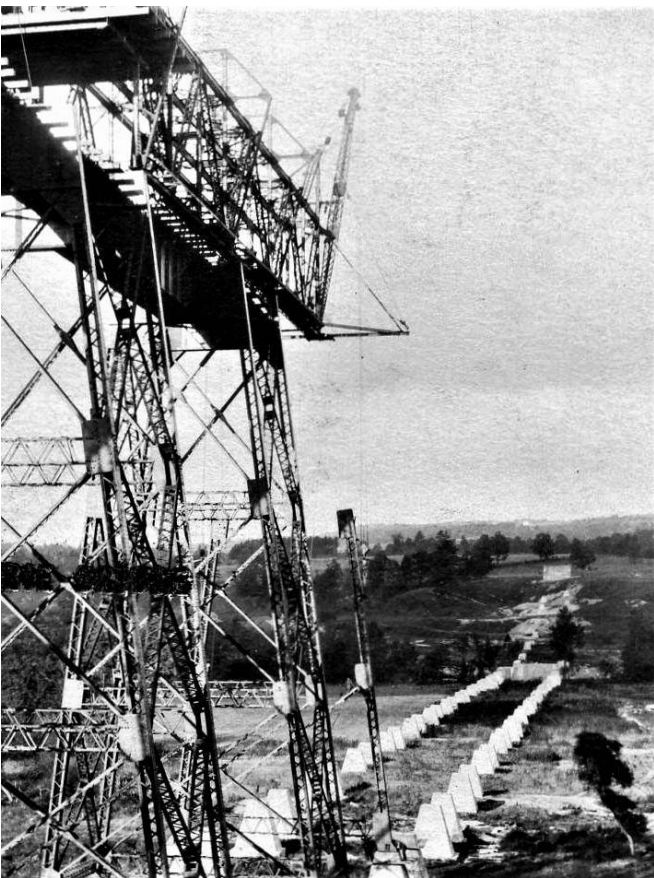
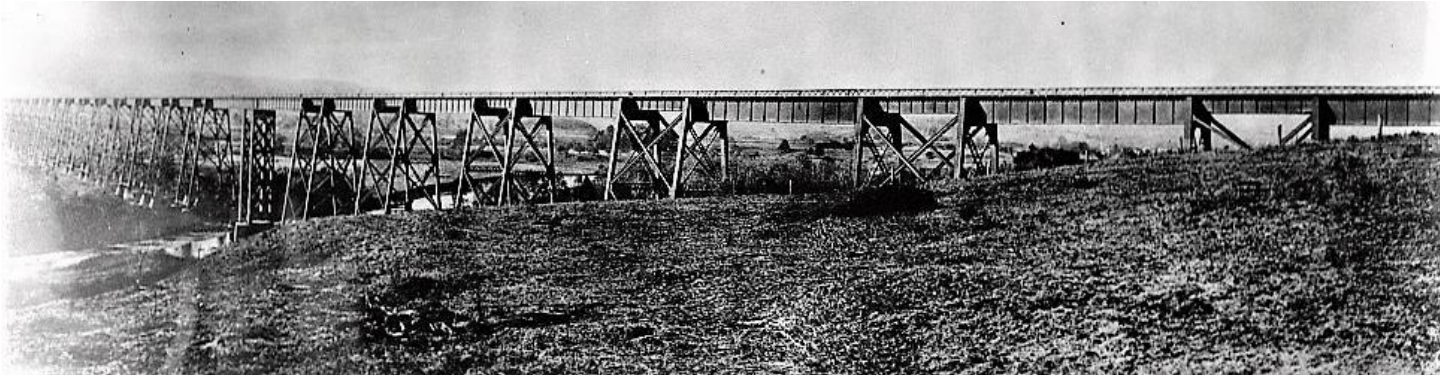
## THE GENESEE RIVER RR - continued

Today the vacant right-of-way and long lines of concrete pedestals for the now-removed bridges (and fading memories) are all that remain of a once-very impressive railroad. And to add insult to injury, the passage of a train on the main line itself over Tip Top has become an exceptionally rare event.

Sic transit gloria mundi. \*

*\*Thus passes the glory of the world*

The Genesee River Viaduct going up in 1908 and coming down c.1981



## CHAPTER CALENDAR

- FEB 8**      **DEADLINE** for registration for Cabin Fever GO Train trip to Toronto. See flyer on page 3.
- FEB 10**     **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center. Slides from the Chapter's Archives, selected by Greg Gerstung.**
- FEB 11**     **Cabin Fever GO Train trip. IMPORTANT! See Feb 8 deadline above!**
- FEB 18-19**   **WNYRHS Winter Train Show, Hamburg Fairgrounds, 10AM-5PM SAT, 10AM-4PM SUN.**
- MAR 10**     **Regular meeting, Town of Wheatfield Senior Center. Duncan Richards presents "Salt Trains of Western NY".**
- MAR 18**     **Annual Chapter luncheon, Ilio DiPaolo's Restaurant, Blasdell, NY, 11:30 AM. Reservation flyer page 4.**

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](mailto:nfcrhs@gmail.com) to the attention of Bruce Becker. 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 at a subscription rate of \$35.00 a year postpaid, e-mail rate \$25.00. Please contact the Chapter at PO Box 1043, North Tonawanda, NY 14120 for 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