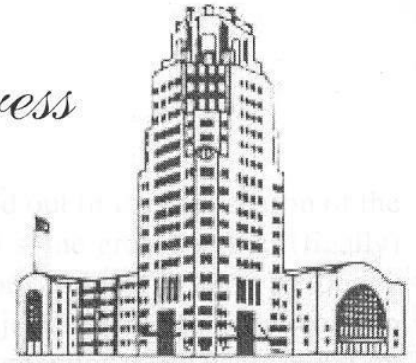


# *Empire State Express*



**May 2021**

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 May 14, 2021. Social distancing and masks are required as we follow NY State mandated safety protocols due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **TWO 16 MM FILMS FROM THE ARCHIVES NIGHT MAIL & FRONTIER YARD**

Night Mail is a 1936 British documentary film directed and produced by Harry Watt and Basil Wright. The 24-minute film documents the nightly postal train operated by the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS) from London to Glasgow and the staff who operate it. Narrated by John Grierson and Stuart Legg, the film ends with a "verse commentary" written by W. H. Auden to score by composer Benjamin Britten. The locomotive featured in the film is Royal Scot Class No. 6115 Scots Guardsman. A true classic of steam night railroad photography, it is always a treat to see this movie.

Frontier Yard is a short documentary all about how a modern freight yard operates.



New York Central's Pittsburgh & Lake Erie's Gateway Yard in Youngstown, OH built during those years of expansion and modernization of the 1950's when steel and coal were still king. P&LE postcard. JCD collection.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



As I write this, I'm hoping that that was the last of the snow for this year. Each year along about now we renew our commitment to the three tenets of our Mission Statement: Preservation, Restoration and Interpretation. A lot of what we have been doing over the last two years has been infrastructure work. The new electrical work, repairing the sewer and the ADA compliance project all fit that category. Once we get past these, we can turn our full attention back to those things that we have stewardship of.

Opening date for the Museum is Saturday, June 5<sup>th</sup>. This depends on a number of things, some of them out of our control. One can only hope that the State of New York will relax their restrictions enough by then. We have had several inquiries about visits to the Museum. We need to do some cleaning in the building and some display work. The usual Saturday work sessions have been going on for many weeks now. We are very fortunate in that our members have been very generous

with their donations during this trying time. This has enabled us to get some things done and feel as if we are getting somewhere.

The ADA compliance project has made some progress. Our contractor to build the deck finished their work. This was on time and in budget. We still have a little work to do. The painting will have to wait until next year because the wood is pressure treated and needs to "season". We need to fill in the space between the legs of the deck next to the lift, but this is just a piece of plywood and a two by four. By the time that you are reading this we expect the lift to be installed. The electric line checked out and is ready. The bathroom itself already has the new toilet installed and Ben Hiltz is gathering up the other items needed.

Our Chicken Barbeque fund raiser is coming up May 15<sup>th</sup>. Tasty, tasty, and you know you want some! And still only eleven dollars! The time is 11am until 2pm. Volunteers are needed, please call Becky at 434 5665 if you can help.

On Saturday, June 19<sup>th</sup> members of the WNY Division of the National Model Railroad Association will be visiting our Museum. They will hold their monthly meeting in the Museum on that day.

Greg and Bob are working to get the 2022 Chapter Calendar ready early so as the have it for sale at the railroad event that WNYRHS is planning for August.

We have had a number of inquiries about a Train Show at Central Terminal this fall. There are two factors that will decide whether that can happen. The first is where the work is on the Terminal itself. The second is the State regulations regarding the Covid 19 situation. Right now we are ready to go if we can do it, but we will just have to wait and see. I look forward to seeing you at the meeting. Don't forget your mask.

*Jim Ball*

## LAST RUN - JAMES J. SCHALK



*As we go to press, we have sad news; long time Chapter member James (Jim) Schalk passed away on April 24 after an extended illness. I know all of us will always appreciate Jim's service to the Chapter. He was a member for some 50 years and treasurer for more than 25 years. I can recall that when I first joined the Chapter in 1977, Jim was always involved and helping in some aspect, collecting dues, helping on trips, giving a report, taking banquet tickets, assisting in all those items an organization needs. In recent years he was always on hand working the chicken BBQ's at the station.*

*He loved our monthly meetings and programs and always had a kind word to offer presenters. Train riding was probably his favorite activity; he was a regular on every Chapter trip, including some really cool overnight safaris we did on Canadian railroads in the 1980's. I can remember a ride some thirty or more years ago on the VIA Rail flagship train, **The Canadian** with its 1950's Budd passenger equipment. Along with other Chapter folks, Jim was there enjoying the view from the dome and the classic round end observation seat in a Park car. His big grin always told you he was really enjoying the ride whether it was steam, diesel, or electric! As a fellow board member, his calm, sound advice was much appreciated. Jim's son, Mike Schalk, graciously provided the following further information about his father.*

“Jim grew up in the 30's and 40's on Clarence Avenue – across from the Erie/DL&W Niagara Branch lines. He spent his after-school hours watching and wandering into the yards to befriend the crews for short (and not too short) rides. His first job was a calling boy and then a car counter for the Lackawanna before Army service. Beginning in the late 1950's, with an Erie/B&LE diesel excursion to Meadville, PA, he joined the Chapter in many other trips and events – especially with CN's 6167 & 6218. He finally joined the NRHS at the 1972 New York Convention and attended quite a few in the next 30+ years. He became Chapter Treasurer in the mid 70's and held that position for over 25 years. He also, later, became a member of several other groups and volunteered with his wife, Helen, on several work projects with the Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec in New Mexico.



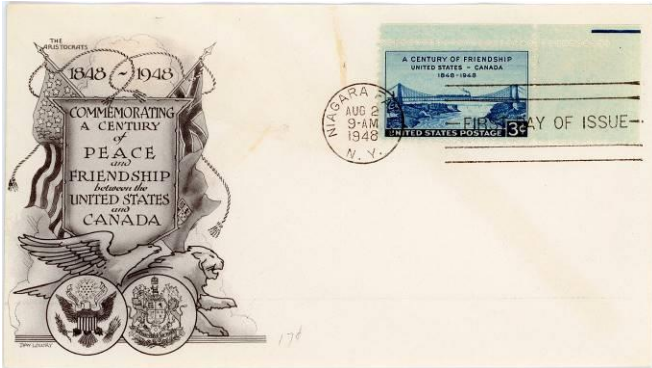
Jim sold a large bit of his railroad collection several years ago, but continued his 'armchair interest' in railroads and trips to the Depew Amtrak depot until early last year. He died after an extended illness at age 87 on April 24<sup>th</sup>.”

We are all saddened by Jim's passing and offer our sincere condolences to the family. May he have an everlasting green signal on the track ahead!

Both photos: Devan Lawton, July 31, 2002

## NIAGARA FALLS SUSPENSION BRIDGE

By Becky Gerstung



The railway bridge at Niagara Falls was the world's first railway suspension bridge. It carried the Great Western Railway, the New York Central Railroad and the New York and Erie Railroad on the upper deck using three different track gauges (with gauntlet tracks) and pedestrians and carriages on the lower level.

In 1844 Canadian entrepreneur and politician William Merritt envisioned a U.S. and Canadian rail network to connect the Atlantic coast with the West. His vision was to construct a suspension bridge across the Niagara River. In 1846 the State of New York and the government of Canada approved charters for the Niagara Falls International Bridge Company and the Niagara Falls Suspension Bridge Company respectively. After the companies were founded four engineers submitted plans and cost estimates. With support from the Great Western Railway to help sell stock the contract was given to Charles Ellet, Jr. His initial design was for a single deck with the railway track in the middle and footpaths on the outer sides. Heavy locomotives would cross and then horses, or lighter engines would pull the cars across.

Getting a line across the gap was solved by an idea inspired by Benjamin Franklin's experiment with a kite. A contest was held, and 16-year old Homan Walsh succeeded in getting his kite across the gorge. Crews tied heavier and heavier line to the kite string and pulled the joined lines until a 7/8" thick cable hung across the gorge. Towers were built on both sides and a ferry basket shuttled workers and supplies. Ellet built two footbridges and joined them to form an 8-foot wide suspension bridge. This was intended to be temporary and used as scaffolding for the permanent bridge. Disputes arose between the bridge companies and Ellet over tolls he charged to cross the bridge. The relationship turned bitter and in 1848 Ellet left the project. After three years John Roebling was engaged to complete the project. He found Ellet's final plan to be impractical and had another double-deck bridge proposal. Roebling completed the project in four years using Ellet's bridge as scaffolding. The rail deck was stress tested on March 8, 1855. Ten days later the upper deck was officially opened. The lower deck had been opened to the public a year earlier. The two countries were finally connected as the first commercial passenger train crossed the bridge. This marked the first working suspension railway bridge in history.

Due to deterioration of the wooden structures they were replaced with iron and steel in 1886. By 1897 heavier trains required replacement with the Steel Arch Bridge, later renamed the Whirlpool Rapids bridge. New York Central's Michigan Central subsidiary also built its own bridge adjacent to the replacement bridge. That bridge is now out of service.

Tourism and trade increased. Prior to the Civil War the Underground Railroad helped slaves escape to freedom via the historic bridge. The U. S. Customs House at the entrance to the bridge remains today and has been opened as a museum depicting these brave journeys.

The Chapter is the proud owner of the cornerstone of the Roebling bridge and it is on display at the museum. *Above: In 1948 the United States Postal Service issued a commemorative stamp and first-day cover on the anniversary of 100 years of peace and friendship with Canada.*

## NIAGARA FALLS SUSPENSION BRIDGE - continued



*Left: This photo shows the interior of the lower level of the bridge. This was a wagon / carrage way path. Above are the railway tracks. Imagine what it must have been like crossing this bridge with its creaking timbers and vibration noises caused by moving trains!*

*Below: The tower bases remained for several years after the towers came down. Both photos: Niagara Frontier Chapter NRHS Archives*



## “SCENE” ON THE LINE

‘Progress’ has left the cabooses behind. For more than a century the end of just about any freight train moving outside of yard limits had one. The electronic blinker that has replaced the unique rolling stock unit we know as the caboose is a poor (but efficient) substitute. Human element aside, the blinker just does not cut it for those of us old enough to recall the days when one deliberately stayed trackside to see the caboose. And yes, the friendly wave of the train crew to those watching is now also a part of a bygone age. The caboose was said to be an expensive relic of 19th century railroading and they began to be phased out in the mid 1980’s in large numbers as railroads, freed from many outdated regulations and practices began to recover from decades of financial decline. Functioning as a base for the crew other than the locomotive’s engineer and fireman, it was also a rolling office for the train conductor. It could double as nighttime and mealtime accommodation for the crew on long runs where needed. It provided some shelter in the often-harsh elements of railroading – winter storms, summer rains, cold or heat, even as basic as a place to take care of nature’s call - the caboose offered a place of respite. But name the one element of railroading that everyone likes and ‘the caboose’ still has a large appeal. Is it any wonder that two items of your Chapter’s rolling stock on display at the museum are cabooses?

Let’s examine some examples of these once plentiful and interesting pieces of railroading history which survive as display or as working elements on tourist operations.



On the tourist shortline New Hope & Ivyland an unlettered, unnumbered specimen is spotted tucked into an old siding. But its universal appeal is immediate with a traditional cupola and bead board external siding. The vibrant red color and simple lines hint this may be a homemade affair. Regardless, it has that traditional appeal we like. January 27, 2007 near Ivyland, PA. JCD photo



On the narrow gauge East Broad Top, caboose 27 rolls south to Orbisonia, PA on a brilliant morning, October 9, 2010. Volunteer crew at both platform ends are enjoying the scenic ride through the Aughwick valley. JCD photo.

## “SCENE” ON THE LINE - continued



Rounding Helmstetter’s curve eastbound to Cumberland, MD the Western Maryland Scenic Railway sports a traditional steel caboose #1906. The post World War II era saw the construction of the last generation of the caboose. Yes, that’s steam on the head end of this photo charter freight train; WM 2-8-0 #734 is out of sight around the bend but with a trail of steam and veil of bituminous smoke in the air and a whistle echoing across the hills, all is perfect in the world. The crummy’s coal stove is also fired up as we get a whiff of its distinct scent on this cold morning of January 6, 2012. JCD photo.



Everyone’s favorite caboose style, the Lehigh Valley’s fleet of steel ‘Northeasterns’ were built between 1937 and 1946. The “Route of the Black Diamond” brought up the markers on countless freight trains over the decades these were in service. Jon Rothenmeyer photo, April 10, 2021, Cazenovia, NY.



Looking back towards the classic, well preserved Cazenovia, NY former Lehigh Valley RR depot gives us another perspective on these really cool cabooses. The slightly scaly paint is prototypically correct....in their later years just before Conrail, the LV was mired in bankruptcy and deferred maintenance made the “crummy” often live up to that moniker. Jon Rothenmeyer photo, April 10, 2021

## CHICKEN BBQ IS MAY 15

The Chapter is sponsoring a Chiavetta Chicken BBQ on Saturday, May 15. As always this is a drive thru, take out operation. Volunteers to help are needed. These events are important fund raisers to keep your Chapter and museum 'in the black'. Dinners ready at 11:30 AM until sold out. Tickets \$11.00 per dinner.

## ON THE TRACK AHEAD

June's program will be Member's night. Those who wish to participate should bring digital format photos on a USB stick. If anyone wants to do traditional 35mm slides, please contact Jim Ball or Greg Gerstung ahead of time so we can have the equipment on hand. **Remember: the meeting WILL NOT be at Central Terminal this year due to ongoing construction work in the Terminal. We will meet at the Degraff Community Center in North Tonawanda.**



## FLAGSTOP ON THE WEST SHORE

Akron Junction where the NYC's West Shore RR and the Peanut Line (Batavia branch) crossed now sports this flagstop style shelter for biking enthusiasts on the trails. Plans are in the works to repaint it in authentic NYC colors and add a replica depot station sign. While we like Conrail blue, New York Central colors will be much more interesting. Add a 'depot' sign and one will almost be able to hear the afternoon local approaching! Bob Andrycha photo, April 8, 2021.



## MUSEUM DISPLAY

The historic West Shore depot in Clarence, NY is seen about 1920. Chapter member Jon Rothenmeyer has a railroad theme exhibit on display now at the Clarence Historical Society museum located on Main Street in Clarence. His display features this and other photos as well as artifacts of our rich rail history. Check online for museum hours.

Photo: collection Jon Rothenmeyer



# All Aboard...

## FOR A HAPPY VACATION

### GO BY TRAIN!



*CHOOSE your own vacationland . . .  
but for extra pleasure . . . go by train!*

It's much more enjoyable. And the train is so comfortable, convenient and dependable. There's room to roam, room to relax . . . whether you go coach or Pullman. Your carefree vacation starts the moment you step aboard any one of the 1100 daily trains that make up Pennsylvania Railroad's great passenger fleets. No matter where you're bound, there's a train ready to take you on the day you plan to go.

Courteous Pennsylvania Railroad employes are on hand to serve you when you make the initial arrangements of your travel details, when you are boarding the train and en route. This year—for the vacation of your dreams—take a happy, carefree trip . . . *Take the Pennsylvania!*

## **PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD**

Visit CHICAGO RAILROAD FAIR

June 25 to October 2, 1949



149

## CHAPTER CALENDAR

- MAY 14**      **Regular meeting. Degraff Community Center, 7 PM - 16 mm Movie Night program: "Night Mail" and "Frontier Yard".**
- MAY 15**      **Chiavetta Chicken BBQ fundraiser at the Station, Drive in, Take Out. \$11.00 per dinner.**
- JUN 11**      **Regular meeting. Degraff Community Center, 7 PM - Member Photo Night.**

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 Tony Schill know by sending it to the [nfcrhs@gmail.com](mailto: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 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