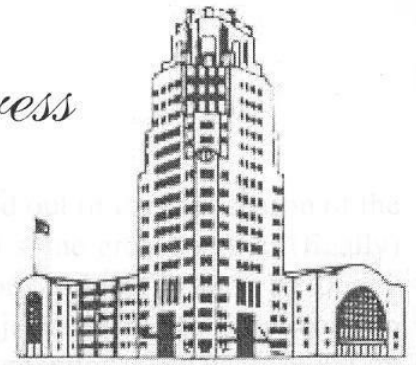


Empire State Express



February 2021

PUBLICATION OF THE NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER NRHS, INC.

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The meeting of the Chapter has been **CANCELLED** for February due to ongoing concerns for our members due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Please continue to check our web site for latest information!



If ever a picture could talk, this is one we all would love to hear! We believe the photo was taken in Akron, NY on Sunday, July 21, 1946. The occasion is a Buffalo Chapter railfan excursion over New York Central's 'Peanut'. As noted in the Chapter history, the special departed from Central Terminal at 10:00 AM (daylight savings time) and operated over the Belt Line to North Buffalo Jct., Falls line to North Tonawanda, then over the Peanut past Tonawanda Jct. to Getzville, past Transit, Clarence Center, Akron, Pembroke and East Pembroke. Continuing east to Caledonia, it reversed direction and returned west over the Peanut crossing the New York Central mainline at Batavia and continuing west on the Peanut to Akron Jct. Switching to the NYC's West Shore route, it ran via Clarence (Hollow) and back to Central Terminal for an arrival by 8 PM in time to connect with trains NYC 5 and NYC 34. Fare: \$3.20. *Niagara Frontier Chapter, NRHS archives.*

Photographer unknown.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Well, here we are. The new year looks a lot like the second section of 2020, at least right now. Human beings have the capacity to imagine a better scenario. I'd like to think in that better scenario, we will have regular meetings again. Perhaps in March, more likely in April. There will be train shows and our Museum will be opened again. Projects will get worked on.

My wife and I both follow the Covid-19 reports from the State because they affect not only our social life but the organizations that we participate in. The February meeting is cancelled but March will have be decided upon after you get this. The latest trends are looking positive for that. We still have the two programs on tap for when we can meet again.

I don't know how many of you know the name Howard Ameling. Those who are also members of the Nickel Plate Road Historical and Technical Society most likely either knew or knew of him. Howard was something of a legend amongst the Nickel Plate folks. His photographic work was so often featured in the Society's publication the Nickel Plate Road Magazine. Through the efforts of Chapter Member John Slater, some of Howard's non Nickel Plate Road material will be shared with us. John and Greg Gerstung are planning on digitizing some movies toward showing them at Chapter Meeting. I'm looking forward to that.

Thanks to all of those who have renewed their memberships already. We lost two long time members last year, Jim Fitzery and Cal Cornwall. We will miss them.

On another subject, Ye Editor frequently asks for material to be published in this periodical. I write this column every month and John often adds original material of his own. Tony Schill contributes regularly. I have offered several times to help anyone who would like to tell a story in these pages. The offer still stands. Imagine your article, "A Tough Day on the Somewhere & Southwestern", a personal remembrance by John Q. Member, as told to Jim Ball. We are in the business of preserving and interpreting the history of Railroads and Railroading in the local area. Some things just don't show up in timetables or on track maps. Writing it down is one sure way not to lose any of it. It will make great reading for the other members.

For those of you who plan months ahead, Becky is negotiating with Chiavetta's for a date in May to hold our annual chicken barbeque fund raiser. I'm looking forward to the smell of chicken roasting over a charcoal fire. We'll publish the date as soon as it's set, however, it's looking like May 15th as we go to press.

I hope that this finds all of you safe and well. We look forward to better times as the new year unfolds.

Jim Ball

“SCENE” ON THE LINEa long time ago....



A rare photo indeed, the Transit station on the NYC's Peanut seen from what we think is the Chapter passenger excursion of July 21, 1946. By this point in time, the western end of what started out as the once upon a time Canandaigua & Niagara Falls was in its last days of existence. The bucolic landscape of the town of Amherst and Town of Clarence will radically change in the coming years with suburban housing replacing the peaceful meadows and woodlands. The western end of the Peanut would be abandoned from Tonawanda Jct. into Clarence by the early 1950s. Based on the marker lamp on the end of the coach, this photo was taken as the train was eastbound to Caledonia, NY. *Niagara Frontier Chapter, NRHS archives. Photographer unknown.*

The 1946 trip was hauled by New York Central 4-6-2 locomotive #4750. The train included five or perhaps six air conditioned heavyweight coaches and a full diner. The trip flyer noted “This line is rich in historical interest, part of it dating from 1853 (actual use). The original Peanut route was about 100 miles long, and had 6-foot gauge! Intended as a connecting link for the Northern Central, the Peanut was soon standardized when acquired by the Central in 1858.” When it was acquired, Dean Richmond, then a Central official, is said to have remarked that it was a ‘mere peanut of a line’. The nickname stuck. The original 6 foot gauge likely figured in the line’s relatively gentle curves. One has to delve back into those pre-Civil War days of railroading’s infancy to get the full story, but suffice it to say that the ever expansive Erie RR also had a hand in the line’s adoption of the wide gauge. Canandaigua to Niagara Falls seemed a logical segment to build a railroad with the newly completed great Suspension Bridge just north of Niagara Falls tapping Canadian markets. For a few years, a third rail would have existed from North Tonawanda to Niagara Falls and Suspension Bridge to accommodate the C&NF along the Niagara Falls branch. The New York Central in those days was still just basically an Albany to Buffalo railroad. And, Cornelius “Commodore” Vanderbilt was still happy to just be operating his steamboats and leaving the new fangled railroads to their own devices.

Another trip in 1949 would mark the impending end of the Peanut as a through route. On the next pages we reprint Harold Ahlstrom’s classic history of these remarkable and truly memorable excursions.



MINI-HISTORY NO. 1

RIDING THE PEANUT

By Harold Ahlstrom

It was the summer of 1946, World War II was over, the ban on railroad travel was lifted, and Russ Shapley, President of the Buffalo Chapter, NRHS, yearned to run a special train on some freight trackage in the area. Arrangements were made with the New York Central to run a train from Buffalo to Dunkirk and then over the Valley Branch (DAV&P). Notices went out and the response was great. At the last minute Central officials told Russ that the Valley Branch did not have clearances for passenger equipment. We later made two trips on the line, but this was a decision of one official at that time! The Central did offer to run a train of air conditioned heavyweight coaches and a full diner over the Peanut Line on July 21st.

What and where was the Peanut? It was a New York Central Branch dating back to 1853 starting at Tonawanda and running easterly through Clarence Center and passing through Akron and Batavia. It then proceeded through Caledonia to Canandaigua. Research reveals that it was originally built as part of a Niagara Falls connection for the Erie from Elmira. One would travel over the Erie to Elmira and then proceed over the tracks of the Canandaigua and Elmira and the Canandaigua and Niagara Falls to reach the Cataract City. Originally a six foot, or broad gauge, railroad to tie in with the Erie, it was converted to standard gauge and acquired by the New York Central in 1858. At the time of acquisition, Dean Richmond, Operating Vice President of the

Central, reportedly referred to it as "only a peanut of a line" and the name stuck. The 1868 Official Guide showed two round trips daily on the Batavia-Canandaigua section, and one round trip between Tonawanda and Batavia.

New notices went out from the Chapter to the membership announcing the substitute train and a most interesting routing. Starting at Central Terminal, the special train would proceed over the Belt Line to North Tonawanda by way of the Falls Line. From



Peanut Line six car special train at Caledonia with engine 4750. Note white shirts, typical of this era the fans came out on trips in their Sunday best. The striped jackets came later!



Interior of diner with large peanut hanging over the end door. Member Larry Burke is seated on left alone (actually, I was having dinner with him, but got up to take the picture).

here we would go on the Peanut Branch to Caledonia, the then eastern end of the branch. Returning through Batavia after seeing the connections at Caledonia with the Lehigh Valley, Genesee and Wyoming, and BR&P, the train was switched to the West Shore at Akron Junction and back to Central Terminal.

The "peanut" theme was carried out in the diner where a foot-long imitation peanut was hung on the end wall and dishes of peanuts were placed on each table.

The second trip over the line was done at the request of the committee running the Village of Akron Centennial. The Chapter was invited to make the arrangements for a trip over the line with the Akron group

selling the tickets and assuming the financial success of the trip. This train also carried a diner from Akron to North Tonawanda and return with roving bands of musicians livening up the party on August 28, 1949.

The Peanut Line was discontinued in sections. By 1967, it ran from Akron Junction to Transit Road with its trains coming out on the West Shore to Akron Junction. During the 1950's, when the New York State Thruway was built, it was necessary to build a large fill and bridge over the line at Pembroke. Soon after

this, the Peanut no longer ran in this area, and part of the roadbed was used when the Pembroke Interchange was built. The Batavia-Caledonia track is still in at this writing, but is no longer used.



A 4700 type engine is pulling the Akron Centennial train westbound into Clarence Center on August 28, 1949. Note circular sign on engine front.

What We All Need to Do About Our Railroad Photos - A Guest Editorial by Becky Gerstung

What...Where...When...Who?

Our Chapter is in the process of enlarging our moisture and temperature-controlled archive room at our station/museum. In preparation for the big move I am sorting and cleaning out files. I started with our photo collection. This is where I ran into some problems.

Even I can tell the difference between a New York Central streamlined Hudson and the Southern Pacific Daylight. But, let's face it, most steam engines look like a lot of other steam engines. If I can't read the tender or even distinguish a number, what am I looking at?

Then there is the question of where. I recognize the Rockville Bridge, Horseshoe Curve and some other famous spots, but a train on rail in the middle of somewhere with a signal or a station barely visible in the background isn't much to go on.

I know regular steam service has been gone for a very long time, some 60 years locally. The Buffalo street cars ended service in 1950. New rail mergers (Penn Central, Conrail, etc.) give some hint to a date range if you can recognize the paint scheme or know your engine renumbering. As rail historians we need to be accurate when dating our photos.

Who gets credit for the photo? When we use material out of our archives for our publications, we like to give credit to the photographer. The backs of most of the photos I have sorted are blank. I recognize the handwriting of some of our members and know what kind of photos they took. That helps, but anyone else doing this would not have a clue.

Please, please, please. Take some time. Being quarantined during this whole Covid nightmare gives you some extra time. Start looking at your photo collections. All the time, travel and expense of processing deserve an attempt by you to write something on the photos. I know it isn't possible to remember when and where you took each and every shot, but maybe a location. At the very least put your name on your photos.

If you are planning to leave your collection to a railroad museum, historical group or a family member, they will appreciate your gift more with some information. It gives it some importance and may save it from being thrown away. I can only imagine how much of our rail history has been lost because people don't know what they have been given or the value.

Back to my sorting.....we try to keep the material at our museum as local as possible. There are any number of museums and historical groups across the country. Material local to them should go there, and we are identifying proper locations for materials not pertinent to the story of railroading in western New York and nearby Ontario to de-accession. So, identify your photos! They will be historic some day.

Editors note: *This month's issue of the ESX with some historic material of the long gone "Peanut line" of New York Central gives a perfect example of what Becky refers to. The photos had only the most cursory of identification. Luckily, several members with sharp eyes were able to identify some details and as a group eliminate some of the guesses that had been put forth as to location and event. Next month we will publish a short series of photos most likely taken on a Buffalo Railroad Enthusiasts (the predecessor group to our Chapter), trip in 1940 on the "Old Woman", the New York, Ontario & Western. These could have been lost to the trash heap if they had not been identified and confirmed by a knowledgeable historian of the O&W, John Taibi of Munnsville, NY, who was, to put it mildly, thrilled at seeing these historic gems! John is the proud owner and restorer of O&W's depot in Munnsville, and that station was depicted in the 1940 photos in our Chapter's archives.*

ON THE TRACK AHEAD

The RED BLOCK of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic with its restrictions on non essential gatherings and health danger to our members has us still on a siding as we move into the second month of 2021. The station remains closed to the public. We hope for better days ahead.

Chapter dues notices have gone out for the 2021 year. Remember, National members should have received separate dues notice for the National membership office. Please return your Chapter renewal as soon as possible and **Thank You** for your extra financial support, especially this year.

LAST RUN

Sadly, we report the just received news that long time member Calvin Cornwell passed away in October 2020. His daughter noted how “my dad loved being a member of the train club.” The Chapter extends its sincere condolences to the family.

RAILROAD RELICS



On a cold winter day a century and more ago, the Erie's Little Valley depot looks to be a busy place. With both freight doors open, perhaps a train is imminently due but the workers are staying close to the pot belly stove in the office until it arrives.

A much smaller fragment of this massive wood frame depot survived well into the 1980's and was frequently a stop for New York & Lake Erie RR passenger excursions. Today the site is devoid of rails and no trace remains of the depot. A pleasure riding trail for those on horseback or on dirt bikes occupies the former track-bed. The locomotive whistle sounds no more for the crossing.

From the collection of the Steamtown National Park, posted on the Internet.

CHAPTER CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 2021 MEETING HAS BEEN CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS & CONCERNS FOR MEMBERS HEALTH / SAFETY.

Please refer to Chapter website and/or Facebook pages online for the latest updates regarding upcoming meetings.

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.

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