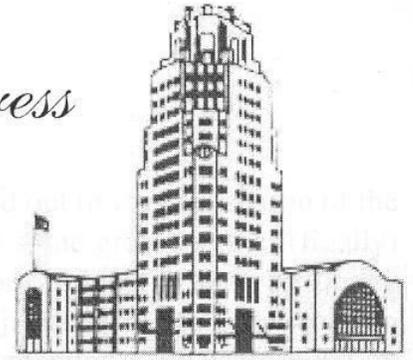


Empire State Express



December 2020

PUBLICATION OF THE NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER NRHS, INC.

Editor: John C. Dahl Email nfcnrhs@gmail.com

The meeting of the Chapter has been **CANCELLED** for December due to ongoing concerns of the Covid-19 pandemic with State and local restrictions on non essential gatherings. Please continue to check our web site for latest information!

MERRY CHRISTMAS



A “Santa Express” on the New York & Lake Erie RR has begun the 2.5 % grade descent of Dayton hill as it returns to Gowanda, NY on December 7, 2019. With its bell clanging & melodious horn echoing off the hillsides at the Maltbie Road crossing, the venerable locomotives shout out “Merry Christmas to all!” -JCD

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



I rarely have to make a decision that is as disappointing as the one to cancel a meeting. We cancelled the April, May and June Meetings because of the Covid-19 situation. Cancelling the December meeting for the same reason is so aggravating. Once we were back meeting again in October and November, I thought that we were past the worst of this. I guess not. The responsible thing to do here is to protect the Membership, respect the Authorities and be patient.

We are heading into that season where it could happen that we would cancel the regular monthly meeting because of the weather, instead of the Covid-19 virus. You all remember that white stuff that makes a mess of the roads? As we have done in previous years, the

cancellation will be on TV channel 2, other TV stations if they will accept it, radio stations Oldies 104FM, WGR 550AM, and WYRK 106.5FM. We usually try to make the decision soon enough to make the 5pm broadcasts.

The year 2020 will go down in history as one we all hope everyone learned a lesson from. There is an old saying, derived from lines written by the poet Robert Burns. It says “The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry”. Boy, did they ever!

I enjoy writing a summary of the year’s events and accomplishments. This year’s list will be a bit shorter than usual, but it is a list. We managed to have six membership meetings. The Empire State Express was published every month. The Chapter Calendar was printed and is available on line or by mail. We did get some work done at the Museum, some planned and some not. Greg completed the wholesale changeover of all the lights in the Station to LED. Our masonry contractor Marty finished the rebuilding of the chimney of EL-2. We had a number of maps and photos scanned to digital as well as the film preservation work that John Dahl has been overseeing. Bruce Becker put us on Facebook and YouTube. Becky got us a grant from National that paid for a new concrete sidewalk. That was poured back in August and one end will serve as a pad for the handicap lift. We also unveiled three historic markers in two separate ceremonies. The latest one of these is detailed below. Thanks to Anton Schwarzmuller for his work on all of these. I’m told that there is another one in the works for this spring.

On Saturday November 14th, a crisp and sunny day, we gathered at the Niagara Falls Amtrak station for a marker dedication ceremony. Mayor Restiano, myself, Anton Schwarzmuller, Sara Capen Executive Director of the Niagara Falls National Historic Area and Kristen Cavalleri, Public Information Officer and Amy Spongr, from the Mayor’s Office, all spoke before the cameras of local TV. We then proceeded around the corner to the marker and posed for pictures, a handsome group of masked men and women. Check our Facebook page for pictures.

Thanks to Ben Hiltz for putting up the Holiday Decorations at the Museum. Drive by some evening and check it out.

Soon you will be seeing the notice in the mail asking you to renew your membership. Please return them as soon as you can. I would also ask that you be as generous as you can with your donations during this lean time.

I hope to see you at a meeting in the New Year, In the meantime, stay safe, and stay healthy. It is my family’s tradition to wish everyone a Merry Christmas. Happy Holidays and may 2021 be a great year for us all.

Jim Ball

“SCENE” ON THE LINE



The 5th generation facility to stand on or near the site of Buffalo’s very first railway depot, the new Amtrak Exchange Street station opened on November 8th. The barrel vault roof recalls the post- Civil War station while the red brickwork takes its inspiration from Fellheimer & Wagner designs such as Elyria, Ohio and Springfield, Massachusetts, all built in the early 1920’s before Buffalo Central Terminal.



The interior is new and bright, a huge improvement over the tiny 1952 box that was erected to replace the long demolished turn of the century Exchange Street. Ironically the 1952 structure served Amtrak for more than 40 years. It served New York Central for less than ten years before the company abandoned passenger service on that line. *All photos, John C. Dahl, November 14, 2020*

CHRISTMAS & the AMERICAN FLYER



My Dad liked trains.

When Dad was a kid in the mid 1920's, one lucky Christmas he acquired a standard gauge American Flyer train set. The red color electric boxcab-style locomotive and a few passenger coaches to match were a great gift for a young fellow full of curiosity and boundless energy. A simple loop of track and a few accessories became a much cherished but well played with toy, even though he had no permanent place to operate it other than the living or dining room floor when he could cajole his mother into allowing it to be setup for a few days. At Christmas time the train would come out of its boxes and was

able to encircle the Christmas tree and what a sight that was! Strings of small sized color electric lights were a relatively new innovation for holiday decorations at that time, and along with the locomotive's headlight, the twinkle of lights and the tree's other decorative ornaments were an intriguing sight. When late afternoon and winter evening darkness closed out the day, the Christmas lights could go on to ward off gloom. The clatter and squeal of the train's wheels along the tinplate trackage made quite a racket, but oh how much fun it was to watch.

Luckily, that American Flyer train was ruggedly built and survived a kid's handling for a good many years. Dad grew up and like all of his generation lived through the terrible years of the Great Depression of the 1930s. His father was out of work, and there would be no new toys or train accessories for many Christmases or any other time. Just keeping food on the table was a struggle. President Franklin D. Roosevelt came into office in 1933, and FDR's fireside chats booming from the parlor radio brought hope to the American people as he and the New Deal began the slow, tough work of rebuilding the economy. The American Flyer would come out of its boxes each Christmas to be placed under the tree, with scant other gifts possible. As the 1930s ended, Dad was by then a young man, and graduating from high school. He had only really started his working career when the disaster of World War II began in 1939. The United States stayed neutral until the 1941 Day of Infamy, December 7th with the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was war! Soon Dad, like thousands of other young men would be drafted. Dad entered the Army Air Corps and became a flight mechanic. During those years away, the old American Flyer somehow survived from being given over to metal scrap drives. Perhaps it was simply good luck, but I think deep down his Mom and Dad also liked that model train, reminding them of happy days when their children were young.

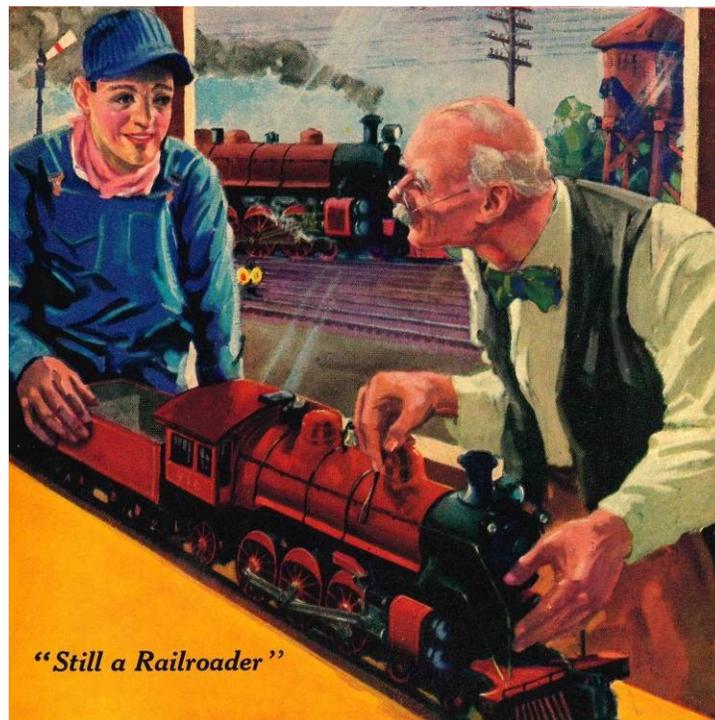
When the War ended and Dad was released from military service, he returned home. Within a year or so had met my mother and was a married man soon raising a family. The Christmas tree in his home of course needed a train. Out came the American Flyer once again. Its years as a toy had taken their toll, so about 1949 Dad acquired a new S-gauge American Flyer set, this time with a New York Central Hudson steam locomotive and a string of really neat looking freight cars. An operating log dump car was fun and the stock-car had miniature cattle that could be loaded and unloaded into a trackside corral! The wrecking crane had a working boom; the bright red caboose lighted up inside. There were miniature Plasticville buildings: station, church, houses, and a water tank for refreshing the locomotive. The two rail track was more realistic than the 1920's train which used a third rail for power. The steam locomotive had a wonderful chuffing sound built in and real smoke came out of the stack as it rolled along under the Christmas tree. A whistling station simulated the melodious sounds of

real steam engines that were still in operation on the Central's Niagara branch just a few blocks to the south of our home. The diesel was soon to be on the horizon, but American Flyer was still 100% steam in the '49 catalog!

Christmas's came and went, the years progressed and I arrived on the scene in the mid years of General Eisenhower's time in office. And under my first Christmas tree was that marvelous American Flyer train setup in all its miniature glory. I suppose I got hooked then and there on trains. Frequent trips out to my grandparents' home adjacent to Tonawanda Junction and seeing the real McCoy only reinforced the wonderment. In those years the Lehigh Valley Railroad ran over what was left of the western end of the old Batavia branch. This was the last two miles of New York Central's former "Peanut" before it joined the Niagara Falls line. The Lehigh Valley was great train watching, and I have many wonderful memories of those years. Dad passed the American Flyer train into my hands within a few years and had setup a table in the basement where we could do some serious railroading. The empire soon expanded.

Birthdays and Christmas would see new additions added. As those years progressed S gauge began to decline by the mid-1960s and we changed over to an HO scale train layout. Even so, the American Flyer always occupied a soft spot in my memory. When I go to train shows these days, any classic American Flyer layout always attracts my attention and I still marvel at those well made model creations in 3/16" scale of the A.C. Gilbert Company. The model train world has certainly changed and progressed in ways that one could never have guessed, but American Flyer is still a name that commands respect among collectors and model buffs. In his later years, Dad purchased yet another train, a Lionel O-gauge outfit to place around our Christmas tree, and that one still sees each December 25th under my own tree. Even that I am now decades older, there is still wonder in a model train. Yes, like my Dad, I will always like trains.

The old American Flyer may have run its last mile and is now only fit as a display piece but it will never be discarded. That train retains an important essence of my memories: of Christmas and of my Dad, may he rest in peace. - JCD



SANTA TRAINS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

The New York & Lake Erie is offering Santa Express train rides on weekends November 28 & 29 December 5 & 6 and December 12 & 13. One hour round trip trains leave the Commercial St. station in Gowanda, NY at 11:00 AM, 12:30 PM, 2 PM, & 3:30PM For tickets and information go to: <https://www.nylerailroad.com> .



The reindeer have been put out to pasture! Santa now travels in style aboard the New York & Lake Erie. He and the Mrs., certainly up in years but by no means 'out' now much prefer the superior comfort afforded by train. A cozy seat in a smooth riding coach, with a piping hot chocolate in hand; you sure can't get that in an open sleigh! And, in the lead what better locomotive could there be on Santa's updated sleigh other than an Alco designed FPA4, all sparkling clean and ready to roll.

Just a year ago, on December 7, 2019 at the venerable Gowanda, NY depot, the Santa Express of the NY & LE RR will soon be receiving passengers for an afternoon excursion up into the winter wonderland forest of the Dayton hill, thru the tiny hamlets of Dayton and Markhams and across the snowbound pastures and fields to arrive in South Dayton. Don't worry. Those reindeer still get around at special events with the jolly old Gent, and are well cared for on a farm deep in the woods of the beautiful landscape of Cattaraugus County.

Running southbound through the pastures, woods and tiny villages the echo of the locomotive horn resounds delivering a message of peace and joy.

Merry Christmas! *JCD photo.*

ELECTION TIME AGAIN - NRHS National representative and Chapter officers

Becky Gerstung was re-elected as the Chapter's representative to NRHS National at the November meeting. The list of positions and nominations for Chapter officers & directors for 2021 is as follows:

President – James V. Ball
Vice President – Gergory G. Gerstung
2nd Vice President – vacant
Treasurer – Al LeTeste
Recording Secretary – Rebecca Gerstung
Corresponding Secretary – Nancy Andrycha
Membership Secretary – Neal Keirn
Comptroller – Bruce Becker
Procurement Officer – Ben Hiltz
Interorganizational Coordinator - Mark Lewandowski
Director (Editor ESX) – John Dahl
Director (Historian) – Dave Skoney
Director (Museum) – Bob Andrycha
Director (Webmaster) – Bob Korthals
Director – Dennis Hurley
Director (Road Foreman Engines) – Steve Frey

The election was scheduled to be held at the December meeting, but since we are unable to hold that meeting, the current slate of officers will remain until the election can be held at the first meeting of 2021. Nominations from the floor can be made at that time, and the Chapter also has several openings in non Board positions for anyone who wants to help. Please contact Jim Ball for details. It's your Chapter and your museum, your help is needed and much appreciated.

ON THE TRACK AHEAD

Once again our path forward is at a 'Red over Red' signal due to the ongoing Covid pandemic crisis and restrictions on non essential gatherings. The station is closed and there will be no Winter Walk this year in early December. If we can have a meeting in January 2021, the program is scheduled as a review of Bicentennial Trains with Mark, "MJ", Lewandowski. Mark has amassed a large collection of 35mm slides and will be our tour guide to the colorful locomotives and cabooses, and other equipment that celebrated the US Bicentennial in 1976.

Looking beyond, we need programs for the balance of the 2021 year and we are also in need of new article submissions, historic photos and news items and photos for the Empire State Express and our website and Facebook pages. Can you help?

Please continue to check the Chapter website for updates on meetings and station status as the Covid situation continues to evolve.

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

LATE FOR CHRISTMAS



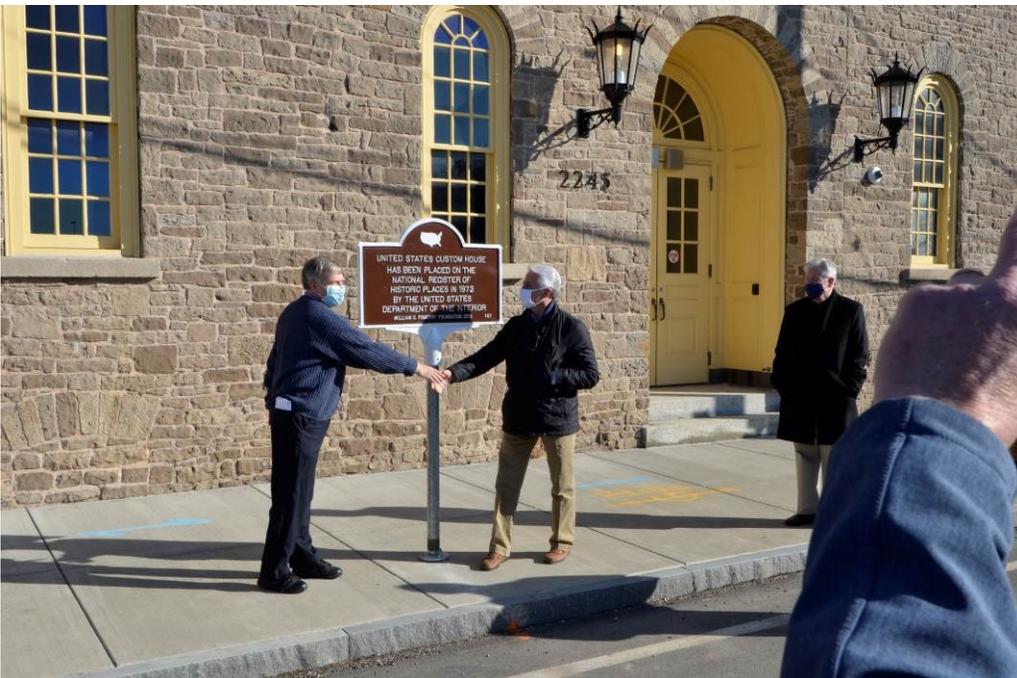
Let's hope Mother Nature's worst will not be so severe this year. Often seen in old photos of railroading's early days in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries are scenes of snowbound trains, and the Herculean efforts of those railroaders to get through. In our area the lines west, south and east of Buffalo frequently do battle with "Lake Effect" snows that can blow in off Lake Erie. Heavy snow can come south from Lake Ontario as well to blizzard effect. The higher land elevations of the Southern Tier often receive the brunt of these storms with paralyzing effects. Whether blizzard or sun, railroaders will see the job completed.

Artwork by Bennett Watson, issued by Railroad Man magazine, circa 1950, collection John C. Dahl.

MARKER DEDICATION AT NIAGARA FALLS CUSTOM HOUSE & AMTRAK STATION



Anton Schwarzmuller is seen above addressing the dedication ceremony group.



The marker has been unveiled and turned over to Niagara Falls Mayor Restiano. Jim Ball is at far right.

The Niagara Falls Custom House is adjacent to the new Amtrak station, and the location in the historic Suspension Bridge area figured in the Underground Railroad in pre-Civil War times. Thanks to Anton's efforts and the William G. Pomeroy Foundation for their financial support makes these markers possible. History occurred here! *All photos by Greg Gerstung, November 14, 2020. (Please see Page 2 of this issue of ESX for more information.)*

CHAPTER CALENDAR

DECEMBER MEETING HAS BEEN CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS. Please refer to Chapter website and/or Facebook pages online for the latest updates.

JAN 8 TENTATIVE Regular meeting, at Degraff Community Center, 7:00 PM. Program: Bicentennial Trains by Mark "MJ" Lewandowski.

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 nfcnrhs@gmail.com THANK YOU

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