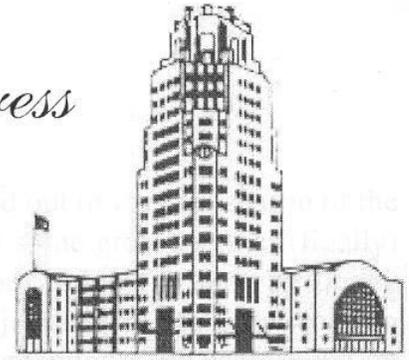


# *Empire State Express*



**March 2018**

PUBLICATION OF THE NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER NRHS, INC.

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

The meeting of the Chapter will be held at 8:00 pm on Friday, March 9, 2018 at 8:00PM in the Degraff Community Center, 139 Division St., North Tonawanda, NY.

## **POSTCARDS OF THE LEHIGH VALLEY RAILROAD**

Ever since Conrail assumed operation of the bankrupt Northeastern U.S. railroads in 1976, the Lehigh Valley RR has been a fallen flag. Once an important link between New York City, Buffalo and Niagara Falls, little physical evidence of the railroad is left today, especially in New York State. What began in the anthracite coal fields of northeastern Pennsylvania grew into a major trunk line railroad, with both freight and first class passenger services. Her decline after World War II is a sad tale, but mirrored the changing economy of the Northeast. Today, occasional odd stretch of trackage may be operated by a shortline, and in other spots the once manicured right of way now forms parts of recreational trails with little to no evidence of the track that once carried countless loads east and west. In scattered places, perhaps an old depot survives, long since converted to other uses or, if lucky, restored as a historical landmark in memory of the line, its history, and its people. Documentation of the Route of the Black Diamond is fortunately not lacking, and through a collection of digitized vintage post cards and other historic photos, your editor will present a look back at the once upon a timetable Lehigh Valley Railroad.



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Ah, February, shortest of the twelve months, and yet sometimes feeling like it's six weeks long. The weather has been crazy for sure, I was not sure if we would have our meeting until it actually happened. Let us hope that we have seen the last of that for this year.

The Chapter went to the WNYRHS Toy and Train Show over the weekend of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. We sold magazines and calendars and handed out literature. We talked to some nice people. We didn't make a lot of money, barely a hundred dollars, but it was great to be out in front of the public in the southtowns. We saw a lot of familiar faces. Thanks to Becky for gathering the materials together to take to the show. Thanks to Bob and Nancy Andrycha for hauling the stuff to the show and setting up and being there Saturday. Thanks to Dennis Hurley for being there Sunday and hauling our stuff back to the station and to Al Le Teste for helping Dennis put it back in the Station.

Thanks to Greg Gerstung for helping set up and take down and being there all day Saturday and Sunday.

Have you sent in your reservations for the Annual Banquet? It's the 24<sup>th</sup> of March and at Ilio Di Paolo's Restaurant. The food will be great, the price is right and the program will be unique. Will I see you there?

There are just a few members who have not renewed, not many. If you are one of them, would you please do that now?

In the coming months we will be again asking for volunteers to help operate the Museum. We publish that the Museum is open from noon until 4pm on Saturdays, June, July, August and September. I try to be there every Saturday, but there are times when I can't. Becky and Greg are there most Saturdays as well, but we would like to have a crew of folks who can fill out those days when we need more bodies. We are working on a self guided tour which should make being a docent easier for some. Let Becky know if you can help.

We have been able to work at the Museum two Saturdays already and will expect to be there every Saturday from now on. This of course, is dependent on the snow accumulation and the availability of the volunteers. If you want to help, call Becky at 434 5665.

On that note, the deadline looms and the editor awaits this column. So, I'll see you at the meeting.

*Jim Ball*

## THE NEXT STOP WILL BE



# SYRACUSE



### PART 3

## TRANSITION TO AMTRAK

Tony Schill

By the mid-1950s the track elevation project and Erie Boulevard Station had delivered nearly two decades of excellent service to both the citizens of Syracuse and the New York Central Railroad. However, in the most recent ten years of that period there had been a significant decline in the fortunes of the Central, especially as regards its passenger trains. Despite a huge investment in new passenger equipment between 1947 and 1950, a steadily increasing number of riders were now choosing to travel using airlines, intercity buses, or, most significantly, their personal automobile.



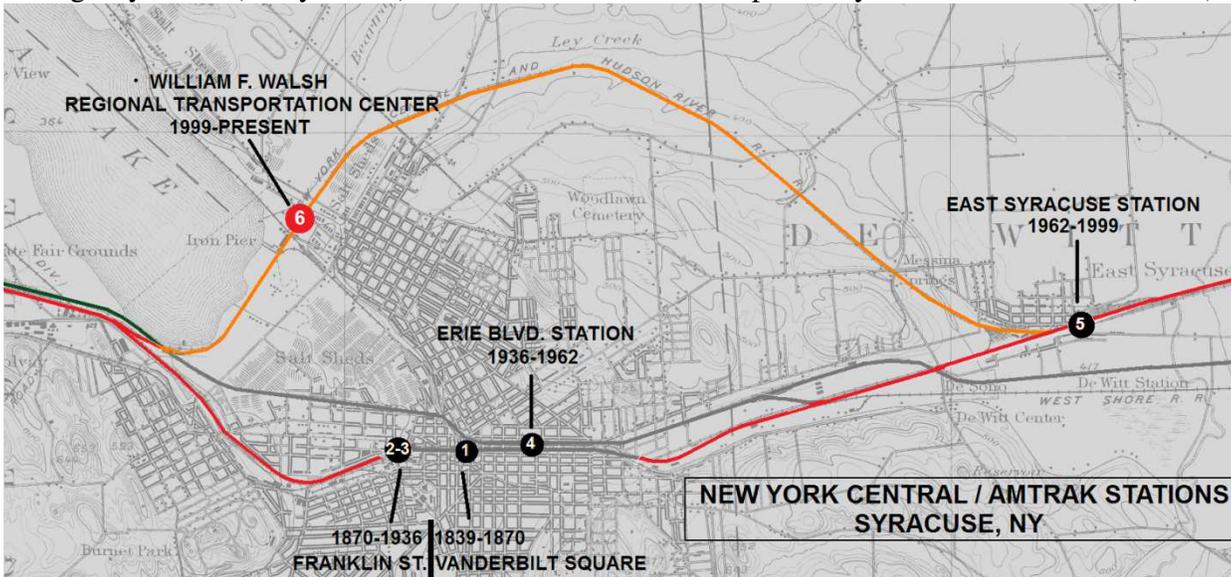
**Train time at Erie Boulevard**

**Aerial View of Track Elevation**

Competition from the auto grew much stronger following the completion of the New York State Thruway in 1954 (the Thruway closely paralleled the New York Central for the entire distance from New York City to Buffalo). The Thruway passed to the north of Syracuse, but was easily accessible from the city. These ridership declines quickly led to a drop in the number of trains operated through Syracuse. In addition, the maintenance needs of the 5-mile track elevation, along with the burden of property taxes, were becoming a serious concern to railroad management.

The fate of the track elevation would ultimately be determined by a document published in 1957 known as the "Yellow Book." Basically, the Yellow Book (so named because of the color of its cover) established the

general layout of the future Interstate highway network which would eventually extend throughout the United States. One part of that vast network included a north-south grade-separated, limited access expressway through Syracuse (today's I-81), as well as an east-west expressway close to downtown (I-690).



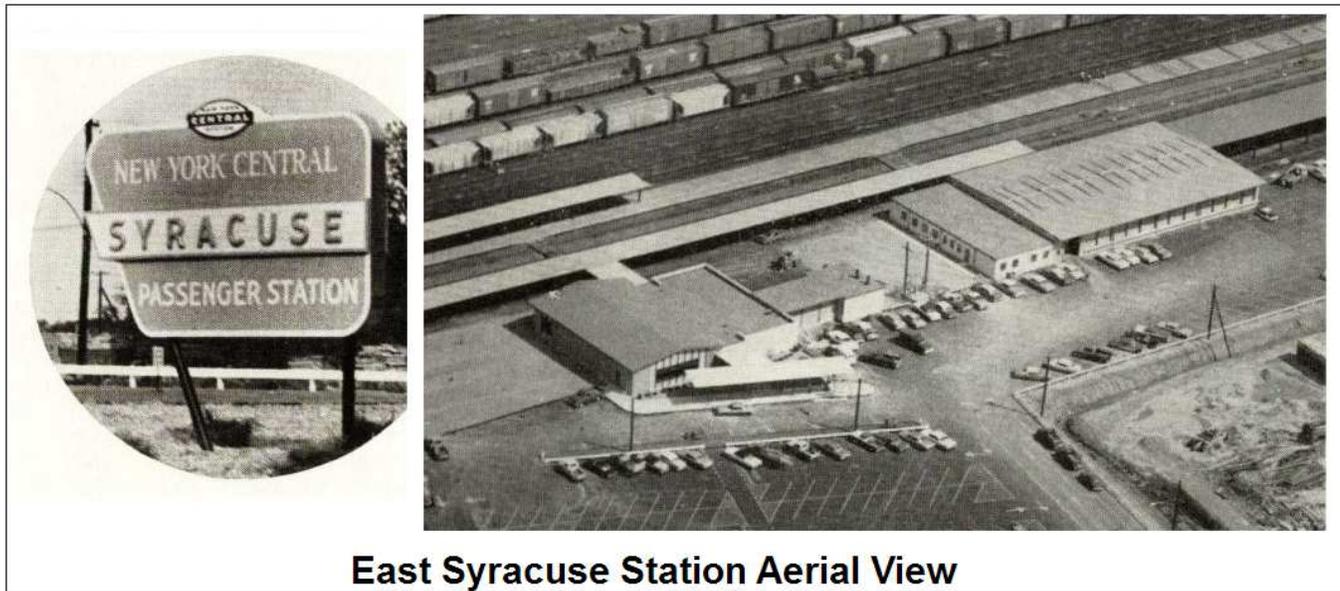
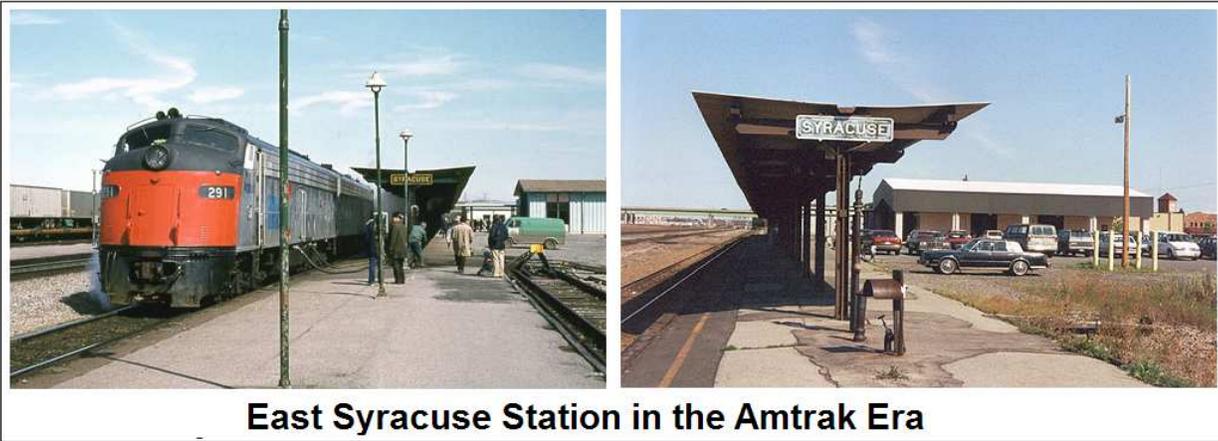
The planners who were charged with determining the actual right-of-way for the future I-690 quickly realized that using the New York Central alignment would minimize the cost and disruptive effect of construction. From the railroad's perspective, sale of the alignment (and consequent re-routing of passenger trains over the freight bypass to the north) had to be seen as highly desirable. After all, the New York Central would be paid a not insignificant sum for the alignment, would not have to bear further maintenance costs for it, and would see a significant reduction in property taxes. Of course, a new station would have to be built somewhere, but given the state of the passenger business, that station could be of a comparatively inexpensive nature. And so it came to be. In 1962 the New York Central gave up its line through Syracuse. On August 29, 1962 all passenger trains began operating over the Syracuse Junction freight bypass; on the same date a new station of much more modest size was opened out in East Syracuse, close by DeWitt Yard. All necessary functions were provided at the new location—i.e., waiting room, ticket office, food service, baggage and express, but the building itself was a far cry from its predecessor, it being of fairly undistinguished contemporary design. However, it did have one feature not previously available to travelers—a 177-space parking lot.



**East Syracuse Station - Opened August 29, 1962**

The East Syracuse Station would be operated by the New York Central until 1968, and then by successor Penn Central until the formation of Amtrak. On May 1, 1971 Amtrak began operations, including the service then being provided between New York/Boston and Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo and points beyond. The East Syracuse station continued to be used, and in fact under Amtrak the building was renovated inside and out.

It served until 1999, when it was replaced by the William Walsh Intermodal Transportation Center near the Carousel Mall northwest of Syracuse on the freight bypass.



The Transportation Center today serves Amtrak (four trains each way daily), intercity buses, and city buses. It is close by a major interstate highway interchange, and free parking is provided. The building itself is of contemporary design and is much more substantial than the former station in East Syracuse. The Amtrak portion consists of a single high-level platform (with a canopy) linked to the main building by an enclosed passageway. Construction cost was \$14 million.



Fortunately, the 1936 station on Erie Boulevard was not demolished when the track elevation alignment was converted to highway use in 1962. For a few years the building was used as a foreign auto dealership (a showroom with large plate-glass windows,

since removed, was added in front of the main entrance). In 1968 the building became the Greyhound Bus Station for Syracuse, in which capacity it served until 1998. After a few years of disuse, during which it was boarded up, the station was renovated and today serves as the studios and offices of Time Warner Cable for Central New York. There is also another part of the station still in existence, but it is on the north side of the Interstate. It consists of the northernmost of the old station's five platforms, and it has survived because it is an integral part of a privately-owned building that once served as the station's powerplant.



For many years statues been placed on the platform to represent people “waiting for the night train.” Ownership of the platform is divided (longitudinally) between New York State and the owners of the building due to the fact that part of it is integral to the building and part of it extends above the embankment wall (NYS owns the wall). The platform, which is not accessible to the public but is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, has become considerably deteriorated since 1962. In early 2016 the New York State Department of Transportation announced a \$1.5 million project to restore the platform, which will never see a train again. This sounds strange, but the platform has assumed historic status, and there is opposition to removing it. I hope you have enjoyed these articles about the New York Central stations in Syracuse!



**1936 station before and after renovation**



**"Waiting for the Night Train"**

## Buying a watch in 1880

If you were in the market for a watch in 1880, would you know where to get one?

You would go to a store, right? Well, of course you could do that, but if you wanted one that was cheaper and a bit better than most of the store watches, you went to the train station! Sound a bit funny?

Well, for about 500 towns across the northern United States, that's where the best watches were found.

Why were the best watches found at the train station? The railroad company wasn't selling the watches, not at all. The telegraph operator was. Most of the time the telegraph operator was located in the railroad station because the telegraph lines followed the railroad tracks from town to town.

It was usually the shortest distance and the right-of-way had already been secured for the rail line. Most of the station agents were also skilled telegraph operators and it was the primary way they communicated with the railroad. They would know when trains left the previous station and when they were due at their next station. And it was the telegraph operator who had the watches. As a matter of fact, they sold more of them than almost all the stores combined for a period of about 9 years.

This was all arranged by "Richard", who was a telegraph operator himself. He was on duty in the North Redwood, Minnesota train station one day when a load of watches arrived from the East. It was a huge crate of pocket watches. No one ever came to claim them. So Richard sent a telegram to the manufacturer and asked them what they wanted to do with the watches. The manufacturer didn't want to pay the freight back, so they wired Richard to see if he could sell them. So Richard did.

He sent a wire to every agent in the system asking them if they wanted a cheap, but good, pocket watch. He sold the entire case in less than two days and at a handsome profit. That started it all. He ordered more watches from the watch company and encouraged the telegraph operators to set up a display case in the station offering high quality watches for a cheap price to all the travelers. It worked!

It didn't take long for the word to spread and, before long, people other than travelers came to the train station to buy watches. Richard became so busy that he had to hire a professional watch maker to help him with the orders. That was Alvah. And the rest is history as they say.

The business took off and soon expanded into many other lines of dry goods. Richard and Alvah left the train station and moved their company to Chicago -- and it's still there. YES, IT'S A LITTLE KNOWN FACT that for a while in the 1880's, the biggest watch retailer in the country was at the train station. It all started with a telegraph operator: Richard Sears and partner Alvah Roebuck!

Bet You Didn't Know That! OK, maybe you did; I didn't!

Now that's History.

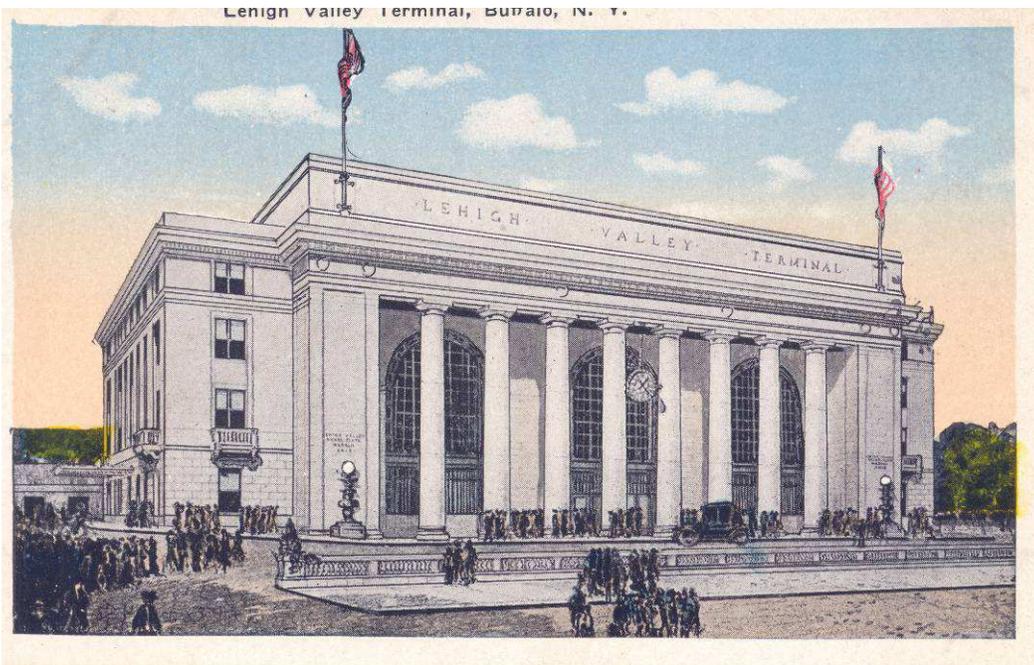
Submitted by: Joan Jennings Scalfani

*Editors note: Joan Jennings Scalfani worked for the New York Central System in the early 1960's as a hostess aboard the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Limited. She has spoken to numerous railroad historical groups, including the New York Central System Historical Society, was a featured participant in the official events sponsored by Metro North Railroad in 2014 for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Grand Central Terminal in New York City, as well as our Chapter on two occasions, relating her fond memories of what it was like to work on what was arguably the 'worlds best train'.*

## POSTCARDS OF THE LEHIGH VALLEY RAILROAD



Allentown, PA In the glory days of the LVRR, several passenger trains made their way daily between New York and Buffalo. None was more famous than the Black Diamond Express, at once proclaiming the very commodity that formed the basis for the railroad's economic well being, anthracite coal!



Buffalo, NY – At its western terminus, the railroad erected this magnificent structure fronting on lower Main Street. The train shed was behind on Washington St. It opened to service August 29, 1916. Sadly, when passenger trains declined in the mid 1950's, the railroad gave up its downtown 'cathedral of transportation' for a short-lived modern facility on the East side of the city. This palace of a station would be demolished in 1960.

See these postcard "vignettes" and a whole lot more of the LVRR at our March meeting!

## A RAILFANS BOOKSHELF

*An occasional column of book reviews*

Lehigh Valley - Best of Bob Wilt

Vol 1: The 1960's

Vol 2: 1970-1972

Vol 3: 1973-1974

Morning Sun Books

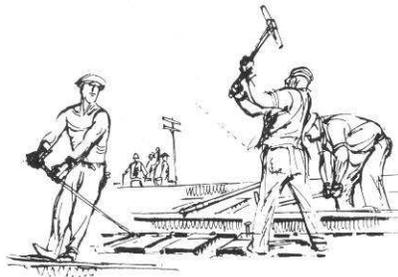
Bob Wilt had the good fortune of being in the right place at the right time with a good camera. And he knew how to use it to advantage as we can see in this stunning new series of photo books on the Lehigh Valley Railroad. The steam era had passed, but the LVRR was still very much trying to survive and even prosper a little bit in the rapidly changing post World War II economy. Bob lived in the area many would consider the heart of the LV, the Bethlehem – Allentown Pennsylvania metro area, and so was able to record a treasure trove of outstanding color photos. The railroad's stable of colorful first generation diesel power was highly photogenic, its' scenic right of way through the Lehigh River gorge, north branch of the Susquehanna river valley, and beyond into Upstate New York's Finger Lakes region and west to Buffalo was outstanding. It served the heavy industrial, mainly steel producing, areas around Bethlehem. This has produced a remarkable record of the railroad's last decades. These volumes are in Morning Sun's new paper back style of print, and as always, the reproduction quality of photos is superb. Even if you have several books on the Lehigh Valley already, you're going to want these which brought back many a pleasant memory from my younger days as a Lehigh observer, and reminded me of that which we have lost. It was a great railroad. - JCD

## ON THE TRACK AHEAD

For April, Tony Schill will present a colorful review of railfanning in the Cajon Pass of southern California. For decades this location has enthralled railfan photographers with its magnificent trackage set upon the steep pass shared by Union Pacific and BNSF on the former Santa Fe mainline. Don't miss this show!

**ANNUAL BANQUET - SATURDAY MARCH 24 – 11:30 AM - NOTE NEW TIME  
FORMAT - LAST CALL FOR RESERVATIONS**

**You still have time....but not much!** Reservation deadline is March 17th. Full particulars were in the flyer which was included in the February issue of the ESX. Note the new time format, dinner served at 12:30 PM Join us for the meal, fellowship, silent auction and program featuring digitized movies taken by the now late Jim VanBrocklin. For information call Becky Gerstung 434-5665 or Nancy Andrycha at 822-5111.



## CHAPTER CALENDAR

- MAR 9 Regular meeting, at Degraff Community Center, 8 PM. Vintage digitized postcards and photos of the Lehigh Valley Railroad, presented by John Dahl.
- MAR 24 Annual Banquet, Ilio DiPaolos Restaurant, Blasdell, NY. "Digitized Railroad films made by the late Jim VanBrocklin". Reservations flyer included February ESX. Deadline for reservations is March 17. Note earlier start time, 11:30 AM, dinner served at 12:30 PM, silent auction and program following.
- APR 13 Regular meeting, at Degraff Community Center, 8 PM. Railfanning Cajon Pass by Tony Schill.

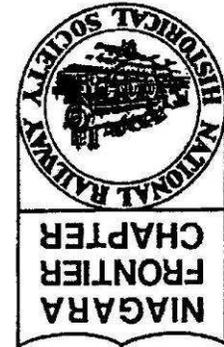
The Niagara Frontier Chapter NRHS, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) publicly supported organization.

Contributions may be deductible for income tax purposes in accordance with the Internal Revenue Service.

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