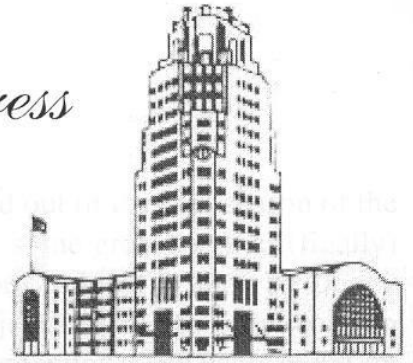


Empire State Express



December 2018

PUBLICATION OF THE NIAGARA FRONTIER CHAPTER NRHS, INC.

Editor: John C. Dahl

Email: newsletter@nfcnrhs.com

The meeting of the Chapter will be held on Friday, December 14, 2018 at 8:00 PM at the Degraff Community Center, 139 Division St., North Tonawanda, NY.

MEMBER PHOTO NIGHT OPEN HOUSE

For our December program, it is your chance dear members to “show your stuff”! We welcome traditional 35mm slides as well as digital photos. Please bring digital photos on a USB memory stick. The Chapter will have both of its projectors available as well as a laptop with sound capability. Please limit to about 10 minutes per person so that all will have time to participate. This is always a fun program. Please join us.

A colorful illustration of a Pennsylvania Railroad train car, likely a Pullman coach, with people boarding and a sleigh in the foreground. The scene is set in a snowy, winter environment. The train car is red with gold lettering that reads "PENNSYLVANIA". People are seen entering the train, and a sleigh with a red bow is in the foreground. The illustration is signed "J. C. Dahl" in the bottom right corner.

HOLIDAY HOMECOMING...

There's nothing quite so pleasant as coming home again... Especially when it's "home for Christmas" ... and when you take the train!

This is the happy season when Pennsylvania Railroad's great fleets of trains between East and West, North and South, assume a particularly festive air.

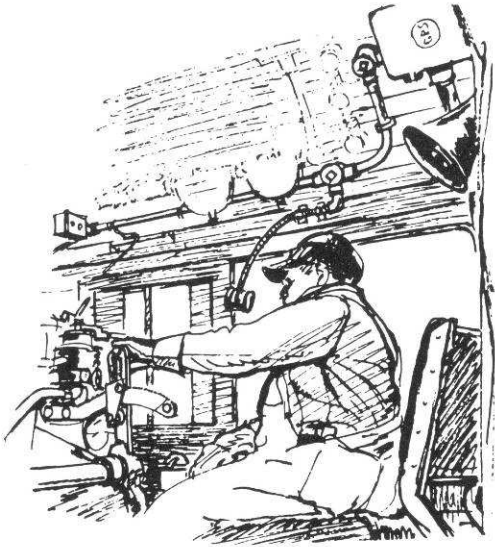
By Pullman, by coach, joyous families are going to visit the folks at home—carefree, comfortable, relaxed as they speed on their way.

For your holiday travels Pennsylvania Railroad offers a wide choice of daily trains... conveniently scheduled to fit your plans.

PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD

Nothing says “Holiday Homecoming” more than a train, and the Pennsy certainly knew how to market this in the golden years of train travel!

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



This is the last edition of this column for this year. It was a year that went by very quickly, but then don't they all? We did have our usual ten meetings with programs, ten editions of the ESX, lots of visitors to the Museum, published our calendar, did plenty of restoration and preservation work and received some donations. We went to the two train shows at the Fairgrounds and the Big One in September at Central Terminal. We hosted a group from the Williamsville Lehigh Valley Station for a tour and advice session. We also attended a Business Fair at Pendleton and of course, sold a lot of barbecued chickens in May. Our many restoration projects moved forward, some quickly, some with great effort. We received a grant to spruce up

EL-2.

Instead of trying to relate all the restoration and preservation news in this one page, I have issued another edition of the column Milepost 13.2, which will appear next month.

The week before Thanksgiving we went to the WNYRHS train show at the Fairgrounds where we handed out flyers for our Museum, meeting invitations and Winterwalk information. Thanks to Greg Gerstung, we had new pictures of the work on the Museum and EL-2 to display. We talked to lots of people about who we are and what we do and sold old calendars and new calendars and lots of railroad magazines. Besides that, at the end of the weekend we put just over four hundred dollars in the bank. Thanks to Becky and Greg Gerstung, Bob and Nancy Andrycha, Steve Frey, Dennis Hurley, and Harold Lee for their help.

Anton Schwarzmüller reports that the Historic Marker for the Customs House in Niagara Falls has arrived. It is in storage until it can be installed in the spring. He is still working on getting a historic marker placed in the parking lot at Artpark marking where the IRC Great Gorge Route crossed the Niagara River from Lewiston, NY to Queenston, Ontario.

One more thing, it's time to renew your membership. The renewal form will turn up in your mailbox soon, if it hasn't already. Please be prompt and I hope that there will be donations to help us continue our preservation and restoration work. Please be generous if you can. You can bring your renewal to the meeting if that's easier for you. Renewals to National have to be done separately.

If the weather should cause us to cancel our regular monthly meeting, check on your TV on channel 2 first, WGR 550 AM, WYRK 106.5 FM, and Oldies 104 FM on the radio as well. We will try to make the decision soon enough to make the 5 PM broadcasts.

To all of you volunteers who have pitched to make it all work this year, THANK YOU! To all of the Officers and Directors who will be elected this month, thank you for taking on 2019 with me. To all of you out there reading this, may your Holidays be full of warm thoughts, family, friends and good times.

Until then, I'll see you at the meeting.

Jim Ball

EL-2 TOWER – HISTORY & PRESERVATION

A short history and update

As was previously announced, the Chapter received a grant from a local foundation to help further preservation of the historic railroad interlocking tower, EL-2, which we own in North Tonawanda, NY.

The tower, built as Erie 2, in the summer of 1911 and placed into service in 1912 protected the at grade crossings of the Erie Railroad's Niagara Falls branch and the parallel International Railway electrified Niagara Falls line (which had leased its right of way from the Erie), with New York Central's Lockport branch. The NYC crossing of the Erie/IRC occurred mostly within the public right of way of Oliver Street. The tower became EL-2 upon the merger of Erie and DL&W in late 1960.

In the first years of the 20th Century, railroads in the Twin Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda were busy enterprises. New York Central's Niagara Falls line (today's CSX) was located essentially parallel to the Erie and IRC. It dated to a pioneer strap rail line completed in 1836 between Buffalo and Niagara Falls. In 1854 the Buffalo & Lockport built a line from North Tonawanda north east to Lockport. (NYC absorbed both lines about that time.) The Erie's Niagara Falls branch had been in place since 1871. The Erie sought its own access from the East Buffalo yards to Suspension Bridge just north of Niagara Falls. Here was the location of the international interchange with the Canadian railroads. At its peak, thousands of freight cars were exchanged here in one month. New York Central and later the Lehigh Valley likewise also had substantial interchange traffic at Suspension Bridge.

The International Railway (formed in 1902) had in 1898 (as the Buffalo, Lockport and Olcott Beach Railway) leased and electrified the eastern track of Erie's two-track right of way. Running both freight and frequent passenger services the grade crossing of Oliver Street in North Tonawanda was a busy and potentially dangerous place. The IRC had also leased the Erie's branch from North Tonawanda to Lockport which added more traffic to the already busy line. Summer extras through the Twin Cities to Lockport and beyond to Olcott Beach on Lake Ontario were a staple of the pre-automobile era. Niagara County's rich agricultural produce traveled in the express compartments of many an IRC "motor" to Buffalo, and entire "fruit extra" trains carrying peaches and apples often were seen from mid summer through the early autumn harvest.

With all this railroad traffic, something was bound to happen, and sure enough it certainly did. In May of 1910 a serious wreck occurred south of the Erie canal railroad bridge on the Erie RR where it crossed New York Central's former Canandaigua & Niagara Falls RR (aka "the Peanut"). The railroads had agreed to modernize and add crossing towers and interlocking plants to better protect the lines at both locations. Previously, flagmen had protected the crossings, but it was evident from the accidents and near-miss situations that something more modern needed to be done to cope with the ever increasing level of railroad traffic.

In May 1911 another serious incident occurred this time at the North Tonawanda Oliver St crossing. Ironically, materials had arrived on location just a few days before the accident for the construction of the tower and interlocking facility. Throughout the summer of 1911 and into early 1912 the work progressed and finally on March 19th the new tower was fully in command of the crossing.

The tower saw the flood of World War I traffic, the booming economy of the Roaring Twenties and the harsh years of the Great Depression. The IRC ended its service on the route in the Depression. World War II put a tidal wave of traffic on both the Erie and New York Central. After the war and into the 1960's both NYC & Erie saw a gradual fading of rail traffic resulting in line cut-backs. By about 1960 the tower was out of service. In 1964 it suffered a fire but remained as a storage facility for maintenance-of-way purposes. The decline continued through the Erie Lackawanna and Penn Central years until Conrail, at which point

abandonment and demolition seemed imminent. In 1987 the Chapter acquired the station and shortly after, the tower. Over the years we did various stop-gap repairs, and a major roof replacement in 2004. Saving the station and our equipment was our first priority; funding was sought several times for the tower with little success.

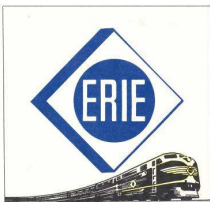


In 2018, thanks to the diligent efforts of Becky Gerstung, the Chapter was awarded a grant from a local foundation. This grant allowed us to turn attention to the upper level of the tower, specifically the windows which had been boarded over for more than 30 years. In the spring, brickwork was re-pointed by students of the Iroquois Job Corps, stabilizing and preserving the lower level. In some cases window sash were non-existent and in others, they were badly deteriorated. The nature of the work on a second story structure along with the necessity of reducing maintenance guided the board in what I believe is a wise decision. A restoration would have required a lot more financially than we as a group could ever hope to raise. And, don't forget we also have a nearly 100 year old freight station museum across the street as well as several pieces of railroad equipment to maintain, each of which has unique requirements.

We hired a contractor to install compatible looking storm windows; these are custom sized, weather and vandal resistant. The original windows are still there in some cases, and our plan will be to repair these as time permits and add mullions to simulate the original look. With this work, this unique building has come a long way. We are preserving one of only two remaining interlocking towers in western NY out of the hundreds which once stood across the state and indeed the entire country.

Photo: Greg Gerstung, November 8, 2018

We can rejoice! EL-2 has been saved from demolition and now looks better than it has in half a century. And the job is not yet finished, ongoing work will continue and further improvements will be made as time and funding permit. EL-2 is truly now an asset to our museum project as well as the community, and will be for many years to come. -JCD



For a detailed history of the tower, please see the Empire State Express May, June & September of 2011. Electronic copies of this are available free on request to newsletter@nfcnrhs.com



EL-2 TOWER (continued)



It was a dreary looking day, October 24, 2018, but for the first time in more than 30 years the tower's windows were free of their ugly plywood covers as work commenced in earnest by Niagara Construction. *Photo Al LeTeste.*



Within a few days, the transformation was beginning. October 27, 2018 *Al LeTeste*

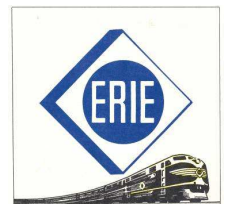
Detail of new window installation & the post & frame construction of the tower. October 25, 2018 *Jim Ball*



EL-2 TOWER (continued)



Window placements & frame reconstruction continuing, note below, right how much deterioration has occurred with several of the windows....i.e. there were no windows! October 25, 2018 All photos, *Jim Ball*



EL-2 TOWER (continued)



Left: Overview of reconstruction of a window frame and general view of tower upper level. Sadly, none of the original interlocking equipment remains, no levers, no control apparatus. Probably these were removed by the railroad in 1964 after the fire. October 25, 2018 *Jim Ball*



The roof is in good condition, the Chapter replaced the roof in 2004 and it remains in decent condition. Now with the addition of the aluminum capping around the roof edges, will go a long way towards making the structure more weather resistant. October 25, 2018 *Jim Ball*

EL-2 TOWER (continued)

A view we don't often get...the operator's view of our station. One wonders what the railroad would have said about that tree blocking the clear view of the mainline track! October 25, 2018

Jim Ball



On November 4, 2018 the tower is looking good, all storm windows have been placed and work above them will soon replace rotted siding with new. The "old gal" is looking pretty again! *John C. Dahl*

From the Chapter archives, one of the relatively few shots we have of the tower in service as a southbound (east by timetable) train heads to Buffalo about 1970. The crossing bells are clanging and the Geep's horn has sounded the obligatory two long, a short and a long blast. A long string of merchandise trails the two locomotives.



ON THE TRACK AHEAD

January's program will feature the digitized films of William C. Kessel. "Bill", as he was known, first appears in our Chapter history in 1942....as 'V/P Publicity', which in those days included getting out the word on the Chapter's meetings and trips. These are dated but interesting films of a bygone age. A group photo on page 40 of the Chapter history includes Bill Kessel.

February will be a review of railroad food terminals in Cleveland and Buffalo by John Slater. These facilities were important rail customers and John has meticulously researched their unique stories. His program will trace the history of food distribution (by rail) in Buffalo, the Nickel Plate's fast freight perishables business, the opening of the railroad's Northern Ohio Food Terminal in 1930, and the subsequent 1931 opening of its second major food terminal facility; Buffalo's Niagara Frontier Food Terminal at the corner of Clinton Street and Bailey Avenue.

ELECTIONS OF CHAPTER OFFICERS & BOARD

President – James V. Ball

Vice President – Gergory Gerstung

Treasurer – Al LeTeste

Recording Secretary – Rebecca Gerstung

Corresponding Secretary – Nancy Andrycha

Membership Secretary – Neal Kerin

Comptroller – Bruce Becker

Interorganizational Coordinator - Mark Lewandowski

Chapter Director (Editor ESX) – John Dahl

Chapter Directors – Robert Andrycha, Dennis Hurley, Steve Frey, Robert Korthals, David Skoney

The election will be held at the December meeting. Nominations from the floor can be made, and the Chapter also has several openings in non Board positions for anyone who wants to help. See Jim Ball for details.

SILENT NIGHT AT TONAWANDA JCT



It is December 25, 1976. The Lehigh Valley's Niagara Falls line and the abandoned former New York Central 'Peanut line' slumber beneath the deep snow at Tonawanda Junction. Conrail has come into existence. Soon the scrappers will arrive and lift the LV rails. The wind swept landscape at this lonely spot will no more see the likes of trains of any kind. Once the high iron felt the passage of westbound trains for Niagara Falls and Suspension Bridge and of those headed eastward carrying Canadian and locally manufactured goods. Decades earlier, the junction witnessed its share of daily passenger trains carrying tourists to the Falls and farmers kids on the Peanut from Clarence, headed to high school in Tonawanda. Now only a ghost train of Christmas past will round the curve and whistle for the crossing. -JCD

CHAPTER CALENDAR

JAN 11	Regular meeting, at Degraff Community Center, 8 PM. The digitized films of William C. Kessel. Vintage movie film from the Chapter archives.
FEB 8	Regular meeting, at Degraff Community Center, 8 PM. John Slater reviews the history of railroad food terminals in Cleveland and Buffalo.
MAR 8	Regular meeting, at Degraff Community Center, 8 PM. Program to be announced.

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 newsletter@nfcnrhs.com THANK YOU

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