



# The Semaphore

Newsletter of the Rochester NY Chapter, NRHS  
P.O. Box 23326, Rochester, NY 14692-3326; Published Monthly

May 2005  
Volume 47, No. 9

## Program for May 19:

### Dunkirk, NY - A Railroad Town

by John Stewart

Dunkirk has a rich railroad history. The original western terminus of the Erie Railroad was here. The New York Central and the Nickel Plate Railroad also served this city. At least one interurban line did likewise. And to top it off, there were TWO locomotive manufacturers located here.

John has frequently visited Dunkirk to investigate historical as well as current activities.

Meeting starts at 7:30 followed by the program. The Chapter Store will be open before and during intermission.

## Future Programs

**June, July & August:** Operations at the Museum.

**Oct. 12:** *New York's Bridges* by James Stewart

**Nov. 17:** *Rochester Transportation* by Donovan Shilling

(These Programs are subject to change.)

## Chapter Library

11 May Street, Webster (by OMID Tracks)

**Hours: 7:00 to 9:30 PM**

**Monday, May 23**

**Library Phone: 872-4641**

## 2005 Capital Fund Drive

The 2005 Capital Fund Drive Committee is happy to report that the drive got off to a great start in the month of April. We would like to report that the Chapter received \$4,550 in dollar for dollar matches from ten donors. This meant that the status of the fund drive as the month ended stood at \$9,100 and that we have reached 12.64% of our goal of \$72,000. The 2005 Capital Fund Drive Committee thanks you for your generous support of our Chapter.

## The NYMT and R&GV RR Museums open on Sunday, May 15.

### Opening Day Attraction: Despatch Shops Revisited

Celebrate the history of the East Rochester Despatch Railroad Car Shops & the Merchants Despatch Transportation Corporation.

Step INSIDE our new exhibit for the Despatch Car Shops & MDT located in the MDT ice-bunker refrigerator car No. 14053!

Tour restored East Rochester built Penn Central transfer caboose No. 18526!

### \*\*\* Chapter Banquet \*\*\* Sunday, June 5, 2005

#### Newport House

(overlooking Irondequoit Bay)

Cash bar: 6:00 PM; Dinner at 7:00 PM

#### Program follows

Cost: \$25.00 per person

Send check payable to: Rochester Chapter NRHS to:

Banquet Tickets

c/O Janet Dittmer

983 Winton Rd. N.

Rochester, NY 14609

We are in the upstairs banquet room with an outdoor balcony.

Don't miss getting the latest collector mug, which highlights another piece of rolling stock in the Chapter's collection.

Directions: The Newport House is located at the end of Newport Road, which is the first left after going under the 104 expressway bridge on East Ridge Road.

*More information on the enclosed flyer.*

### Elections of two Trustee at May meeting

The Nominating Committee has selected three candidates for the two trustee positions. So you have someone to vote for!

The ballots and the 2005 membership list were mailed on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, and you should have received yours by now. Return them by mail, or bring them to the May meeting.

candidates are:

1. **Robert Achilles** Bob is active in maintaining our Track Cars, and also a model railroader.

2. **Mike Roque** Mike is President of the RIT Model Train group, and assists around the Museum and brings in other RIT personnel.

3. **Don Wawrzniak** Don is in charge of our Store and takes it to area train shows.

### Joint ESPA/RRTC Meeting

*by Dave Luca*

On the evening of Monday, April 25, members of the Empire State Passenger Association (ESPA) and The Rochester Rail Transit Committee (RRTC) met to discuss

*(Continued on Page 3)*

### R&GV RR Museum polo shirts available

The R&GV RR Museum has embroidered polo shirts available for sale. The polo shirts are high quality, short sleeved shirts embroidered on the left breast with the museum's 'Route to Industry' logo. The shirts are hunter green and are \$20.00 each. Shipping & handling will be \$4.00 extra (for up to 3 shirts) if you want your shirt sent to you vs. picking it up at a Chapter meeting or at the R&GV Railroad Museum. These are the shirts we encourage our depot guides to wear when they volunteer on our open Sundays. This helps our visitors know exactly who are tour guides are.

If you are interested in ordering a shirt, please contact Chris Hauf (crhauf@rochnrhs.org 585-381-8583) to place your order. Delivery will take 2-3 weeks.

## Track Car Operator Schedule

Date	Operator A	Operator B	Operator C	Primary Car
May 15	Bob Achilles	Harold Russell		TC-1
May 21 *	Bob Achilles			TC-1
May 22	Greg Harris	Steve Huse		TC-3
May 29	Gary Dettman	(open)		TC-1
June 5	Ryan Kane	Steve Huse	Bob Moore	TC-3
June 12	Bob Achilles	Harold Russell		TC-1

\* NMRA-NF Lakeshore Divion Meet: 9-12

Qualified Operators Please Note: Pick a date that you like, then contact Harold Russell to be put on the official schedule. Harold's e-mail address: [haroldrussell@juno.com](mailto:haroldrussell@juno.com).

## Depot Guides Schedule

Date	Guide #1	Guide #2
May 15	John Stewart	
May 22	Dave Peet	Ira Cohen
May 29	(open)	
June 5	Jeremy Tuke	
June 12	Dave Luca	
June 19	Mike Root	Lynn Heintz

It is desirable to have TWO guides for each Sunday. Please consider when you would like to serve and contact Dave Peet at: [davepeet97@frontiernet.net](mailto:davepeet97@frontiernet.net).

### Jean Bellenger

Chapter member, Neil Bellenger and his brother, Boyd, lost their mother, Jean, on April 30. She was 93.

## Two Groups to visit May 21

### RR Modelers:

The Lakeshore Division of the National Model Railroad Association will be visiting in conjunction with their Spring meeting. They will be here in the morning and midday, for tours, track car rides and a midday train ride.

### Boy Scout Troops:

A group of scouts from Livingston and Wyoming Counties will visit to complete work on their Railroad Merit Badge. A small work party will be on hand.

### Contributors to this issue

Janet Dittmer, Dale Hartnett, Chris Hauf, Chris Hausler, Dave Luca, Dave Peet, Charles Robinson, Harold Russell, Joe Scanlon, John Stewart, Rand Warner and various publications as indicated.

## Please Note ...

We are starting off the season with several vacancies in the Depot Guide and Track Car Operator Departments. This is not a desirable situation if it extends further into the season. Please volunteer a date, rather than have the coordinator call you

### Steam Team Meets

This team meets the first Saturday of each month. Anyone interested in 'steamers' is invited to attend. For information, contact John Redden at [ejredde@frontiernet.net](mailto:ejredde@frontiernet.net).

## 2005 Chapter Rail Tours

### The Spring Tour:

Canadian Spring Adventure to Quebec City and Montreal by Rail; May 30 (5 days, 4 nights). Visit Montreal, Quebec, and along the shores of Lake Champlain.

### The Fall Foliage Tour:

Fall Foliage Tour by Rail: Boston, Portland and the Maine Coast; Oct. 6 - Oct. 10 (5 days, 4 nights). Visit Boston, Portland, Freeport (shopping at L.L. Bean), Kennebunkport, Trolley Museum.

### The Pre-Christmas Tours:

Dec. 1 - Dec. 3 (Thursday-Saturday) & Dec. 9 - Dec. 12 (Friday-Monday)

Off to the "Big Apple" for the famous Christmas Show at Radio City Music Hall, and shopping.

If interested in any of these trips, make reservations with Jim East. His phone is 585-377-5389.

Space still available on all trips.

## Membership Report

Janet Dittmer, Chair

### Welcome to these new members:

#### Donald and Suzanne Stinson

PO Box 98, 7709 Main St.  
Kanona, NY 14856  
607-776-8433 [dinstinson@frontiernet.net](mailto:dinstinson@frontiernet.net)

Interests: Rolling stock restoration; Trips; Museum tour guide; Historical construction equipment; Museum operations; Track car driver  
Experience: Switched cars, working off 60-ton Brownhoist.

#### Michael Root

52 Nettlecreek Rd.  
Fairport, NY 14450  
223-4906; [mikeroot@USAdatanet.net](mailto:mikeroot@USAdatanet.net)  
Interest: Museum tour guide.

### A Renewal absent from the 2005 list:

#### Thomas Ewert

165 Floverton St.  
Rochester, NY 14610  
288-0131

## About those 2<sup>nd</sup> Notices

Some of you may have receive a 2nd Notice from National. If you renewed before February 20, you have received your 2005 membership card. National has your renewal and the 2nd notice is an error on National's part.

### Membership Contact:

Janet Dittmer, Membership Chair  
983 N. Winton Rd.  
Rochester, NY 14609-6824  
<[daveluca@frontiernet.net](mailto:daveluca@frontiernet.net)>

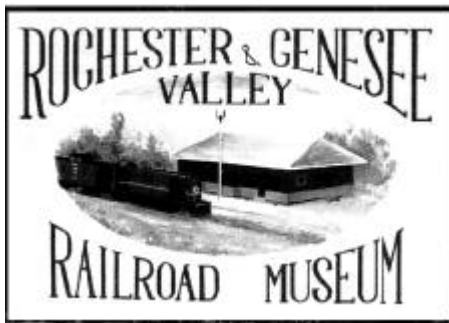
### Membership Rates:

National + Chapter membership: . \$40  
Above as Family membership .... \$50  
Local\* ..... \$20  
Local as Family\*..... \$27  
(\* Holds National membership elsewhere)  
National only ..... \$20  
National as Family only ..... \$23  
Subscriptions only: ..... \$10\*  
\* Effective January 1, 2005.

### Young Railfans Dates:

Sat., May 21 10 AM-3 PM  
Sat., June 4

Another installment of Chris Haulser's "Telegraph" starts on Page 6.



## MUSEUM MUSINGS

I hear the same plea from fire departments, service clubs, churches and, yes, even museums.

"We need new members."

"We need younger members."

"We need to grow to provide the services people expect from us."

As we all lead lives that are more and more busy, the amount of time left for the community shrinks.

Our own volunteers feel the increased pressures of family, job, other community service activities and even the aging process. All limit the amount of time people can contribute to the Rochester and Genesee Valley Railroad Museum.

Like all the other fine community-oriented organizations, we need to rejuvenate ourselves with new, active members.

Here are several steps we can all take to address this challenge and, perhaps, help someone reach self-fulfillment at the same time:

1. Invite someone to visit our museum. Saturdays are a great time to visit. Our Thursday night Chapter meetings (third Thursday of the month) at the museum during June, July and August also work very well.

2. Be warm and welcoming to visitors who attend our special events. Get to know them as people. The more we care about them, the better they'll feel about us.

3. Depot guides can help by including a brief pitch on how guests can get involved. This may work especially well on the Saturday hours in July and August when we are working at the museum.

4. Invite friends or co-workers to one of our work sessions. It may seem strange that so many of us really enjoy working on our days off. Help your friends understand how their skills or interests might fit in with what we are doing.

5. Be warm and open toward strangers who "stop by" to check us out on weekdays

## Managers

**Railroad:** (Motive, Rolling stock, MOW, ROW)

**Chris Hauf:** 381-8583; crhauf@frontiernet.net

**Infrastructure:** (Buildings, grounds, shops, construction, communications, signals & power, heavy equipment)

**Dave Luca:** 288-0318; daveluca@frontiernet.net

**Visitor Experience:** (Visitor, Train & Track Car operations, 4-Q Vision, Special events)

**Dale Hartnett:** 243-0139; dhartnet@foxrochester.com

or Saturdays. You never know who might turn into a great volunteer who has badly-needed skills.

There are lots of community organizations who could use more help. We need to set ourselves apart by doing what we do extremely well and by being open and friendly toward prospective volunteers.

It's ultimately about people. Recruiting is not about reaching a mass audience of people. It's about connecting with people, one individual at a time. People are likely to go where they are respected and appreciated.

A smile, a "please" and a "thank you" go a long way.

Please join us in our recruiting effort. Thank you for all you continue to do. Let's share the fun this summer!

## Library Report

*Charles Robinson, Chairman*

The library will be open for general use between **7:00 and 9:00 PM Monday evening May 23**. We still have surplus books for sale at reasonable prices. So come on out and see the selection.

Jerry Gillette has continued to organize our photo collection. Jerry has completed our first organized attempt to list the vast Charles Best collection of color slides. The collection now needs to be better organized with railroads, engine types and so forth sorted to group them properly. Any volunteers?

We plan to continue this listing and organizing to other parts of our photo collection.

Gale Smith has more books and tapes to catalog. We are asking the video viewers to critic a number of tapes from Dan Cosgrove collection. A form will be in each tape package for your comments.

There are rumors that an estimate has been obtained in regard to roofing the library. Much needed help for the library is on its way. Thanks so much Bob.

Hope to see a flood of members at the next library session for YOUR use.

## ESPA/RRTC Meeting

*(Continued from Page 1)*

the possibility of working jointly to explore and promote ideas to improve passenger transportation by rail in western New York. Karl Greenhagle, Rochester Area Regional Coordinator for ESPA and DeWain Feller, Chairman of RRTC, led the meeting.

Informal discussions touched on the Amtrak funding crisis, conditions at the downtown Rochester Amtrak Station, conditions onboard the Empire Service trains, High Speed Rail (HSR) proposals for western New York and the need for a stronger local coalition of citizens and local leaders.

Everyone present agreed that both organizations should continue to meet jointly on a regular basis. It was suggested to investigate the possibility of having future meetings held at the Amtrak Station with local public figures in attendance. A steering committee will meet in May to plan future joint meetings. If you are interested in these regional meetings or need additional information about the organizations, please contact Dave Luca at 585-288-0318 or <daveluca@frontiernet.net>. Get on board for an improved transportation system in western New York.

## Rochester Region Visitors

*by Rand Warner*

From Rochester *Democrat & Chronicle* of April 5<sup>th</sup>, we got 1.6 million visitors through the greater Rochester area last year.

From the Rochester *Democrat & Chronicle* of May 2<sup>nd</sup>, we got 23 million visitors through the Finger Lakes area last year.

If we could attract just 1% of those Greater Rochester area visitors, we would have an annual attendance of 16,000!

Our current combined Museum and Excursion attendance of almost 10,000 is over 1/2% of the Greater Rochester area visitorship; however, many of our attendees live inside the area.

## Traction Action

*Bernie Cubitt, Foreman*

### Rochester Lockport & Buffalo Interurban #206

Two new bolsters are now fabricated by welding up stock parts.

We will continue preparing the underside and frame of the car body for re-installation of the new bolsters.

Then with proper bolster plates we can set the car body on proper trucks we already have.

### Line Car 01

*Rand Warner, Foreman*

Rand Warner is continuing to remove all items projecting below car body frame.

Then we can either set the carbody on a flat car or relocate and repair the bolsters so we can re-set the car on trucks.

### Subway Car #60

*Rand Warner, Dave Luca, Foremen*

We are making plans for the 50th Anniversary Celebration of end of service on the Rochester Subway. Otto Vondrak has submitted various proposals.

We are also pursuing additional restoration funding for metal, wood, mechanical and electrical rehab work to make the car run.

### 300 Kilowatt Substation

*Jim Johnson, Foreman*

Easement has been received from BOCES for Niagara Mohawk to run in power.

O'Connell Electric is on contract to do outside hookup work.

Inside wiring for ac three-phase and dc to trench has started.

Auxiliary control and monitor wiring has started. [RW]

## REA Truck

*Foremen: Lynn Heintz, Dick Bean*

Lynn has changed over the clutch assembly to fit the new motor to the old type clutch and existing transmission, with help from Bob Mader and Rand Warner.

Dick Bean has been rehabbing components at home. So far he has done starter, generator, fuel pump, lights, etc.

Bob Mader and Lynn have installed replacement rear axles.

We hope to have the engine and a new gas tank and radiator installed soon, so truck will run. [RW]

## Preparations for new siding on west side of LA&L RR

*by Rand Warner*

Scott Gleason and Dan Waterstraat are continuing relocation of heavy equipment along the west side of the LA&L RR to permit construction of new siding on west side of LA&L RR. This has been a very challenging job, working under the worst of winter conditions; with snow, mud, stuck brakes, dead batteries, etc. But none of this could stop our stalwart construction crew!

Track centerline for the new siding has been staked out per LA&L RR engineering recommendations.

A location for the turnout has been selected about 1300 feet north of the centerline of the NYS Route 251, and this location would be acceptable to LA&L RR.

## Track Department

*Supt. Randy Bogucki*

Spring track inspection is underway by Randy and his section foremen.

A new shipment of very good relay ties is now on hand to support main line rehab and new track construction.

Tie changeout rehab work has already been completed at Scanlon's curve.

More tie changeout work is scheduled for the Hill Block, north of the Depot, and for the S-curves south of the Loop Switch. [RW]

## Thanks to ...

**Harold Crouch** for recent inputs on steam and diesel motive power and rolling stock.

**Rand Warner** for donation of dedicated tool set and tool box for track car maintenance, and locating a line side phone for display.

**Gary Warner** for large donation of contractor equipment.

**Bernie Cubitt** for repainting the Burma Shave signs along our tracks, and the sign long Route 2251.

**Jeremy Tuke** for donation of paint for track cars and trailers.

**Everyone** for all your donations of materials, money and effort. Our museum could not run without your support! *However*, contact one of the three managers if it happens to be an artifact or equipment.

## Tracks in the Snow ...

*by Rand Warner*

Train tracks that is. Switches in particular! Charlie Lowe & Crew of NYMT may have scored at least a New York State first for rail museums by completing the major portion of construction for their new switch into the new trolley shed during the winter snow season of 2004-2005!!

Charlie and son, Trevor, assisted by a few hardy NYMT and R&GVRM souls, were installing ties, timbers, rails, points, frog and guard rail right through the thick of an upstate Western New York winter. This demanding effort was made so as to not jeopardize operation of track cars for the 2005 season opening.

Now we have got two bench marks raising the bar for our joint museum trackwork:

1. R&GVRM working regularly under the lights after dark on Tuesdays.
2. NYMT putting in a switch over the worst part of our winter season.

## Prep for Tracks into Restoration Building

*by Rand Warner*

Winter's snow and Spring's mud have dried up enough to permit resumption of the BIG DIG effort. Joe Scanlon, John McDonald, Art Mummery, Scott Gleason, Dan Waterstraat and others have restarted efforts towards creating new road bed for new tracks.

Dave Luca and others have regraded and smoothed our muddy roadways that support all our projects.

Wood and steel for the tracks and switches are being staged by Dave and Randy Bogucki.

The big Koering shovel is to be relocated out of our way, then we can install drainage pipes, etc.

Plans are in the works to relocate motive power and rolling stock out of the area.

This year should see actual track and switch construction in earnest.

## Wanted

- Rail end stops
  - Rail skates
  - Wheel chocks
  - Cantilever passenger car jacks
  - Skid steer loader
  - Rolling track gauge for NYMT
- Contact Rand Warner, 585-428-8586*

**The NYMT and R&GV RR Museums open on Sunday, May 15.**

## Construction & Equipment

By Joe Scanlon

"If you can't move dirt, then Service equipment!" With that for their marching orders, the construction equipment diehards: Art Mummery, Scott Gleason, Dan Waterstraat and Joe Scanlon met on a soggy April Saturday morning at the Webster library site to load out the Northwest truck crane and bring it back to the museum.

Since it hadn't been operated in about 2 years, the lower unit needed a little TLC before it could be coaxed back to life. But Doctor Mummery performed a little surgery, and the International Harvester 501 truck engine coughed, fired up, evened out and idled down - ready to go to work.

Mendon Enterprises showed up with the 'rail trailer' lowboy, got into position, and Art guided the 25-ton weight lifter onto the trailer. A quick trip at interstate highway speeds to Industry behind a Peterbilt road tractor brought our treasure back to the depot, where it was off loaded, driven in to the equipment yard and parked. Next the crane gang evaluated the upper crane power unit - a Continental 427 gas engine - and determined that with a little ignition work we would have another operating heavy lifter in our fleet.



The Northwest 25T truck crane is a former State of New York Highway Department crane of 1960's vintage. Meticulously cared for by New York State, the crane is in exceptional condition. At some point the crane was transferred to the New York State Canal Commission and did maintenance work along the Erie Canal. The crane had been purchased at auction by Mr. Andy Hill of Andy Hill Welding and Crane of Webster, NY. Mr. Hill donated the crane, along with an identical parts machine to our museum about 2 years ago. Northwests were

known to be heavy duty workhorses and were expensive, well built units in their era. Now the 25T is a classic addition to our collection, and will perform power lifting around the museum.

Thanks to our dedicated volunteers for again making the magic happen at Industry, and special thanks to the Mendon Enterprises team, who go out of their way to make our moves easy!

## Super Scenery

by Rand Warner

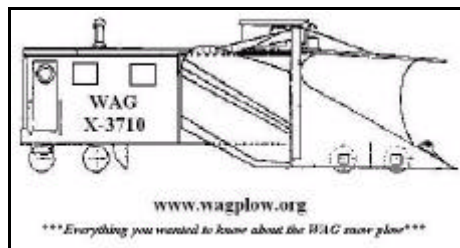
Do you realize the blessings we have in the quality and variety of our scenery at R&GVRM, NYMT and along our connecting main line?

- ? Hardwoods and evergreens
- ? Fields and farm lands
- ? Cuts and fills
- ? Flats and grades
- ? Curves and culverts
- ? Great views and vistas
- ? All kinds of wildlife

What a treat for our visitors and for our volunteers, and to make our Special Events more interesting!

Now just think about all the potential additions to the above list afforded by the expansion plans of our *Four Quadrants Vision* ...

Scenery is a VERY special asset!! We can exploit it many different ways.



Jesse Marks, Young Rail Fans coordinator for the WAG snow plow work, submitted this drawing. It will be considered announcing news on this item in *The Semaphore*.

### Visiting Groups

These groups have signed up to visit in May:

- School #8 preschool
- Harley School preschool
- Rochester Children's Nursery #1 & 2
- Mom's Club of Gates
- Little Path (June date)
- Keuka College Volunteer group
- Brockport Scouts
- Lakeshore Division, NMRA
- Scout Merit Badge Work Session
- Churchville Cub Scouts

### Shows, etc.

**July 5-9:** *National NRHS Convention*, Portland, OR.

**July 5:** *10-Year Anniversary Celebration*, Steamtown National Historic Site, Scranton, PA. Year-long celebration.

**July 17-23:** *NRHS RailCamp* in Scranton.

### Dates in RR History

**5/5/1929:** A Canadian National radio operator achieved two-way telephone conversations with moving trains.

**5/7/1859:** The Atlantic and Great Western Railroad Co. of New York was chartered. It immediately entered into a contract with the Pennsylvania and Ohio companies and purchased the line of the Erie and New York City Railroad.

**5/10/1869:** The Golden Spike was driven at Promontory Summit, Utah, joining the Central and Union Pacific Railroads. The cost of the rail line from Omaha to Promontory Point was \$59 million and six years after beginning the project.

**5/10/1893:** NYC locomotive No. 999 attained a record speed of 112.5 mph between Batavia and Buffalo with Batavia engineer Charles Hogan at the throttle. [*American Rail Link*, Issue 206; via Phil Houle]

## Medina RR Museum hosted "Thomas, the Tank Engine"

For two weekends in May, the Medina Railroad and Fire Museum hosted the famous Thomas the Tank Engine that kids love.

Rides were available. It was reported that all tickets for both weekends have been sold.

## Finger Lakes Live Steamers

by Harold Crouch

A lot has been going on here at FLLS at Marengo. Tie and rail on our 1-1/2" scale ground line has continued and the 1" scale boys are progressing as extensive for their line with a big cut and embankment for a bridge. Also a concrete slab poured for an engine storage building. We now have a big drainage ditch to keep the property properly drained and is working well.

October 16, 2004 was our final run session for the season. It turned out to be a dull, raw day and so only a couple "diesels" operated.

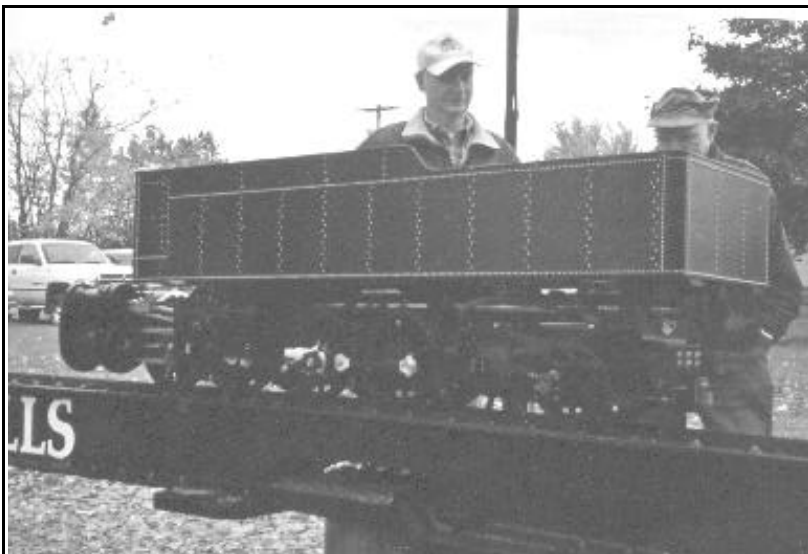
Of great interest though, was our member Mike Darbyshire from Palmyra, NY brought the tender and rear engine of his Erie RR *Triplex* locomotive in 1-1/2" scale. It is a museum job!! The front two engines are running on air and at present he is constructing the boiler. The locomotive will be 13 feet long! Possibly next year he may have it in operation. --- Harold Crouch

### Schedule for FLLS for 2005:

Open House: June 26 & 26; 10-4

Open House: September 24 & 25.

Visit [www.FingerLakesLiveSteamers.org](http://www.FingerLakesLiveSteamers.org) for views and map.



Mike Darbyshire, builder, and Harold Crouch discuss the tender with engine for Erie R.R. "Triplex" locomotive (2-8-8-2) in October 2004.

## Subway Bed to be Filled

The April 23<sup>rd</sup> issue of the *Democrat and Chronicle* carried a front page story of the proposal to fill the subway bed between Exchange and Brown Streets with compacted dirt. The Subway is under Broad Street. In the process the current steel supporting structures will be removed. The area under the Broad Street Bridge will remain for future development; the lower part of this bridge, constructed of stone, was the aqueduct of the Erie Canal when it ran through the city. It extends under the Rudnel Library.

On the 29<sup>th</sup>, Chapter President, Jeremy Tuke, replied to the article with a letter to the D&C to inform readers of the historical value of the subway and its possible use in the current re-development of the area of Main Street around Nick Tahoe's Restaurant (the former Buffalo Rochester and Pittsburg Railroad Station, successor to the Rochester and State Line Railroad.)

## "Railroad Tech"

"Railroad Tech" is a column written by Frank Peragine in the Bridge Line Historical Society's *Bulletin*. To date, it has covered numerous items having to do with technology of railroads and railroading.

These BLHS *Bulletins*, of about 40 published every month, are available in our Library. It is planned to collect the "Railroad Tech" columns and place in a binder for easier retrieval. Your Editor finds them interesting, but they are too lengthy for inclusion in *The Semaphore*.

## Another Installment on the Telegraph

# Telegraph Shorthand

by Chris Hausler

These days when a telephone modem connection gets you about 2500 characters per second and much more with DSL or cable modems, its hard to realize that the average performance on a manual Morse Telegraph circuit was between 2 and 4 characters per second. Further, the railroads and in fact the entire industrial revolution succeeded for over 100 years communicating at this speed. It has been said that the railroads were the "arteries of the industrial revolution". If so, the telegraph was certainly its nervous system, and the "body" couldn't have thrived or even existed without both of them. In order to increase the overall throughput of the telegraph a number of things were done, both technical and procedural. Technical things included "duplex" and Edison's "quadraplex" systems, the "Wheatstone Automatic" and others. We're going to briefly look at some of the procedures.

These procedures mostly boil down to various "shorthands". Some were employed by telegraphers themselves and others were available to what today we would call the "end users" of the Morse system. Some were formally defined and some were ad hoc, becoming "standard" through repeated use due to their obvious utility. There were a number of regional and industry specific "dialects" which developed as telegraphers interacted with each other. During quiet periods, telegraphers would "chat" with each other becoming the first of what today we would call an "on line" community. The overall goal was efficiency and thus economy of operation.

Telegraph offices were all given one or two character "office calls" which would uniquely identify that office, at least on that telegraph line. These can be sometimes still be seen posted on the outside of railroad control towers, what few of them remain. Operators also each adopted a one or two character "sine" to identify themselves. Their initials, the first two letters of their first or last name or just something they liked were typical choices.

There was a digit code, called the "92 code" by Western Union in 1859, but used in various forms by all the telegraph services. Its not clear there was ever a "standard" version of this code as it was modified over time. The railroad dialect of this code included "19" and "31", matching

(Continued on Page 7)

## The Telegraph (From Page 6)

the two common railroad form numbers used for train orders. The operator's "Best Wishes" or "Regards" code "73", so popular with radio amateurs is part of this code. "30", meaning end of transmission was used widely by press telegraphers. Others included "1" wait a minute, "4" where shall I go ahead, "6", I am ready, "13", I understand, "25" busy on another wire, not to mention "88", love and kisses (There were women operators too!).

Message handling was done using a number of additional abbreviations. These included: PD for paid, CK for check, FM for from, SG for signature, HR for have ready, NO for number and of course, OK. When responding to a call, operators would send "II" to indicate they were ready to receive. Thus if office DS was calling office NB, DS would send "NB NB NB DS" to which NB would respond "II NB". For train orders, an operator would send SD (N or S or E or W) acknowledging to the dispatcher that he had received the "copy 3 east" (in this case SDE) and had set the east "order board" to show the stop aspect. This kept any trains from passing the station in that direction until the orders were delivered or ready for delivery. When a train passed a station the telegrapher would send an "OS" to report it "On Station" (or sometimes considered "On Sheet" for "on the train sheet").

Early on telegraph users developed various secret codes to keep their communications secure. However, there were also many such codes developed that were not intended for secrecy in any way but rather for brevity. In these codes an individual word would replace a whole phrase, maybe keeping the resulting telegram shorter than the classic "10 words or less" and thus not incurring extra charges. Many different books of suggested cipher codes were commercially published, usually with phrases addressed to some specific industry or range of industries. Western Union published a "commercial code" they recommended. Railroads did this as well to allow their telegraphers to more efficiently handle railroad business. In my collection I have a B&O Railroad pamphlet "Telegraphic Cipher Code for General Use"

May 14, 1927. According to a penciled note in it, it was the office copy at WC office. Some examples from it are "absorb" meaning "advise at once by telegraph if you will have this done by close of this week", "fair" meaning "for loading to Pittsburgh", "snarl" meaning "superheater units leaking" and "figtree" meaning "furnished detailed report covering derailment of ...".

Some you hope they didn't have to use too frequently and wonder why they needed an abbreviation, such as "hatched" meaning "Hurry final report covering accident as covered by Form 491 No. ...". The pamphlet is 118 pages of fine print with about 30 codes per page. With this type of code, it was the "end user" who did the encoding and decoding, not the telegrapher. He or she just sent the telegram with the code words as written.

This was not the case with the famous "Phillips Code" used primarily by press telegraphers. The Phillips Code was developed by Walter P. Phillips of the AP in the 1880's to speed the transmission of press dispatches. It is a shorthand code for several thousand common words and phrases used by the press. Press telegraphy was a grueling duty that the telegraphers would be working constantly at the fastest possible speeds. Of course, it paid well too. In this case the sending telegrapher would be handed a dispatch in "plain English" and would have to simultaneously convert it in his head to Phillips code and then send the Phillips code down the wire in Morse. The receiving operator would do the reverse, typing the resulting "plain English" on a typewriter. This could frequently improve the overall throughput to 60 to 80 words a minute, about as fast as one can type. Want a job? A few examples are: B - BE, C - SEE, O - OF, R - ARE, Q - ON THE, N - IN, V - OF WHICH, Z - FROM WHICH, DLY - DELIVERY, T - THE, TT - THAT, OMD - OMITTED, OWZ - OTHERWISE, 5 - THAT THE, TY - THEY, and the well known POTUS - PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

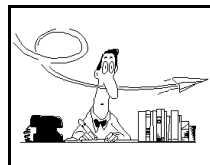
Then there was just a lot of common practice. For instance, "GA" meant go ahead, "GM" meant good morning, and "GN", good night. A railroad telegrapher could not leave his post until receiving a GN from the dispatcher. A man sent to a station to cover just one shift might, if he was lucky, get an "early GN" from the dispatcher if the last train was heading back toward the telegrapher's home. The conductor would hold the train momentarily so the telegrapher could "OS" the train, lock up the station and then board the train, getting to sleep in his own bed that night. Many dispatchers having once been telegraphers were sympathetic and would send an early GN if appropriate. It was said of others, however, that they "wouldn't give their grandmothers an early GN", thus dooming the telegrapher to stay out the rest of his shift and remain at the station overnight. He then might curl up on the operators desk using the station's copy of the

"Official Guide" for a pillow and try to get some sleep. Such was life on the telegraphers extra board. It was said of many telegraphers that they could sleep soundly this way with the instruments chattering away next to them but would come awake instantly and be ready for business if their office call came in over one of the wires.

The use of "shorthands" in messaging continues to this day. Some cellular phones have a "text messaging" facility where the user can enter a short message and send it to another cell phone user. The small keypad and limited screen size of the cell phone as well as a general desire on the part of the users to keep it simple and easy has led to the development of a "text messaging slang" which uses many abbreviations.

An Australian museum decided to hold a contest between modern "text messengers" and telegraphers. A test message was selected and given both to a pair of telegraphers and a text messenger. The text messenger was permitted to use all the text messaging slang possible. However, the telegraphers, true to the way classic "10 words or less" telegrams were sent to send each letter of the message, letter perfect, with no shorthand. The contestants were: Sending telegrapher - Gordon Hill, age 93; Receiving Telegrapher - Jack Gibson, age 82; text messenger - Brittany Devlin, age 13, with two years experience as a text messenger, considered a "pro". The selected message was, "Hey, girlfriend, you can text all your pals to tell them where you are and what you are wearing." And the results were: The telegraphers, 90 seconds to a complete written out message; The text messenger, 108 seconds to a complete message. Three further teenage text messengers were tested but the telegrapher's record time held.

Maybe new cell phones should come equipped with a built in telegraph key and sounder and we should be teaching our children Morse code. It would seem to be more efficient.



## Editor's Corner

Articles by Ted Jackson: "The Round Pie Station"; Harold Russell: "Riding The Auto Train" and by a 90-year-old LV RR veteran reminiscences, recruited by Bob Fitch, all away their light of day in *The Semaphore!*

Time for an extended issue?

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Chapter Meeting & Program:  
**Dunkirk, NY - A  
 Railroad Town**  
 by **John Stewart**  
**Thursday, May 19, 2005**  
 Starts: 7:30 PM  
**40 & 8 Club**  
**933 University Ave.**

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Contributions to *The Semaphore* are welcomed and encouraged from all readers. They should be mailed to: Gale E. Smith, 299 Seneca Park Avenue, Rochester, NY 14617-2433. Phone: (585) 544-6221. Contributors using a computer are asked to send their submissions on any MS-DOS diskette in ASCII or \*.txt format, as well as a printed copy. Also can send by e-mail to: gale299@frontiernet.net. **Deadline: First Day of Each Month.**

**Restoration Building Floor Fund**

*by Dave Luca*

One of the Chapter's major goals for 2005 is the installation of the inspection pit and concrete floor in the east side of the Restoration Building. Chapter volunteers will perform the pit excavation and the slab grading. Pre-qualified concrete contractors will perform the concrete placement work. The estimate for this is \$75,000. Recent donations in **BOLD**.

Help "cement" together a great project! Each block represents \$3,000.

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