

THE

SEMAPHORE

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCHESTER & GENESEE VALLEY RAILROAD MUSEUM

VOL. 63 NO. 12
DECEMBER 2020

NEXT MEETING:

December 17

*Duncan Richards presents
"Frostbite Ferroequinology v3"
Scenes of Winter Railroading*



Looking back to last December when we used one of our New York Central *Empire State Express* coaches for our annual "Santa Trains to the North Pole." We look forward to operating this popular event again next year when conditions permit. PHOTO BY JACKSON GLOZER

Season's Greetings

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As the kids say, "Well, that sucked." That's probably the most charitable thing we can say about the year that was 2020. The global pandemic has touched every part of our lives, from lost loved ones to devastating effects on the local economy. It's difficult to weigh one situation against another, especially when we are considering our museum. To protect the health and safety of our volunteers and visitors, events were canceled and other activities were cut back significantly. As your museum depends on admissions for the majority of its income, spending was frozen, except for the essentials such as fuel and utilities, and a handful of projects funded by grants outside our normal operating budget.

When it was safe to do so, we cracked the door open a little bit. We were able to host a few public events and break even with our expenses. We saw an increase in grants and

donations. Through it all, our volunteers worked diligently behind the scenes to keep the museum open and complete several major projects in the safest manner possible. Frankly speaking, this past year was about survival. Working together, not only did we survive, we even managed a bit of modest growth along the way. And for that, we should all be extremely proud.

As I enter my second term as museum president, I'll be working with the board and our department superintendents to create a blueprint for measured success in the years to come. I look forward to working with all of you to see it through.

We want to keep you all connected during this difficult time. Your ideas for our museum's future are welcome. Please email me at ovondrak@yahoo.com or call me at (585) 820-2341.

—Otto M. Vondrak, Museum President



www.rgvrrm.org

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ABOVE: Project manager Justin Carmona (LEFT) and volunteer Bill Marcotte (RIGHT) discuss repairs to the southwest corner of Erie C254. With metal repairs complete, the walls can be re-assembled inside this winter.



RIGHT: Repairs to the safety cage for the Kodak tank car have been completed by Bill Marcotte, and a fresh coat of primer was applied by volunteer John Redden on December 2.

BELOW RIGHT: Our new cellar entrance door, built by Charlie Marks, our Buildings & Grounds Supt. Originally a coal chute, this area was expanded by museum volunteers to allow for an exterior staircase and entrance in the 1980s.



BELOW: Our contractor arrived on December 7 to repair the floor in our south waiting room. He will return in the spring to sand the floors and apply finish. The repair and refreshing of the depot floors was made possible thanks to a generous donation by David Monte Verde.



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UPCOMING •VIRTUAL• MONTHLY PROGRAMS

Due to rising infection rates in our area and new restrictions in Monroe County, our monthly member meetings will be held virtually until further notice. Meeting notices will be sent via email with Zoom invitations included.

Our next meeting will be Thursday, **December 17**, starting at 7:30 p.m. Following a brief business meeting, member Duncan Richards will present “Frostbite Ferroequiniology v3.0” featuring railroad photography in winter snow, an all-new show with some old favorites mixed in.

For our **January 21, 2021**, meeting, member Peter Gores will show his slides of railroad action in and around the New York and New Jersey metropolitan areas on the eve of Penn Central.

We are currently seeking programs for future meetings, of just about any relevant railroad-related topic. Please contact Otto Vondrak at ovondrak@yahoo.com to reserve your presentation slot.



ABOVE: Several volunteers helped clean the south end of the Restoration Shop on December 11, including David Gwilt, Bill Marcotte, Tim Gifford, and Tony Mittiga.

RESTORATION SHOP CLEANUP

Several volunteers helped clean up and organize the south end of the Restoration Shop on Saturday, December 11. Surplus items were marked for disposal and removed from the shop floor, while other items were reorganized for better access. Storage items were palletized awaiting placement on the pallet racks along the east side. An additional bay of pallet racking was installed in the northeast corner of the shop, over the parts washer. Thanks to Jeremy Tuke, Scott Gleason, Tim Gifford, David Gwilt, Charles Rothbart, Tony Mittiga, and Bill Marcotte for their assistance. We will be taking further steps to clean up the northwest corner of the shop to prepare for the next phase of concrete floor installation in the spring. —O.M.V.

DEPOT FLOOR REPAIRS

Michael Abbazia from Abbazia Flooring arrived on December 7 to make repairs to the floor in the south waiting room of the depot. He will return in the spring to sand the floors and apply a fresh coat of polyurethane finish. This project was funded in part by a generous donation from member David Monte Verde. —O.M.V.

ROCHESTER SUBWAY CAR 60 UPDATE

Rand Warner and Dave Luca continue to work on Car 60. Primer has been applied to bare metal surfaces on the body and window frames. We expect the volunteers from

Sheet Metal Workers Union 46 apprentice program to return in 2021.

The next phase of work will involve reconstructing the vestibules at both ends of the car. Only one end contains motorman controls, but both ends are nearly identical in terms of design and operation of doors. To repair and replace the various wood and sheet metal parts will cost roughly \$10,000, including donations of parts and labor. A final budget will be drafted and presented for consideration to the board, along with avenues for potential fundraising to fund this crucial work. Upon completion, the body will be complete, and attention can turn towards “cosmetic” items like windows, doors, and finishing the interior.

ERIE CABOOSE REPAIRS

Bill Marcotte welded in a new patch in the southwest corner of the exterior, and reattached the grab iron on November 21. Justin Carmona and Dave Coon cut back rotten floor boards and sub-floor material. Bare metal was primed on December 6 in anticipation of installing replacement floorboards and new wall panels. Work will continue through the winter to repair and replace window sashes, and glaze with new panes of safety glass.

RESTORATION UPDATE LEHIGH VALLEY CABOOSE 95100

Chuck Whalen continues to sand and fit the window sashes into their frames. Sam Rosenberg mounted hinges to hang the two



ABOVE LEFT: Over the weekend of November 8, Mike Dow, Greg Lund, and David Kehrler carefully removed the Baltimore & Ohio color position light signal from its mast at Switch 6 for relocation along our main line. **ABOVE RIGHT:** In its place is a Pennsylvania Railroad position light signal, donated by WNY&P Railroad. Look for some reconfigurations and new additions to our signal system in the coming year.



LEFT: On November 28, Dan Waterstraat, Adam Lloyd, Jeremy Tuke, and Scott Gleason regraded the access road along Track 9 in anticipation of addressing drainage issues and rebuilding the slope of the hillside in the spring. At work are our Case backhoe, Army dump truck, and Komatsu bulldozer (and Bobcat and road roller).

BELOW: Volunteer Chuck Whalen prepares window openings for new wooden sashes on Lehigh Valley caboose 95100. Additional skim coats of body filler will be applied to prepare the exterior for the final coat paint this spring.

end doors. Additional research revealed the location of the sink (between the fuel oil tank and the stove) as well as the location of the steel window blank behind the stove. Work will continue through the winter to hang the exterior doors, as well as the various closet doors inside the car. Once the weather warms up, additional skim coats of body filler will be applied as we prepare for the final finish coat of paint this spring.

—Sam Rosenberg, Project Mgr.

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS

Among the Priority Projects selected by your Board of Trustees is the completion of concrete slab between the rails of Track 9 inside the shop, as well as pouring the first part of the slab along the west side of Track 7. Once this is complete, we will be



able to establish a much more efficient and productive woodworking area. Before any of this can happen, we will need to clear out twenty years worth of accumulated materials, as well as evaluate some of the woodworking tools currently located there. If you're interested in establishing a permanent woodworking shop area, please contact Charlie Marks.

Repairs to Industry Depot and improvement to the grounds were also listed as a Priority Project for 2021. We will be replacing the fascia boards around the depot roof, as well as the gutters, among other repairs to keep the property in top condition.

ELECTION RESULTS

Our 2020 Elections were held on November 19 at 933 University Ave., Rochester, N.Y. Due to rising infection rates, the meeting was held virtually, but members were allowed to drop off their ballots in person. Dave Scheiderich, Dave Shields, Chris Hausler, and Don Wawryzniak counted and verified all ballots.

David Monte Verde was elected for a one-year term as trustee to replace Mark Wilczek who is stepping down. Charlie Marks and David Kaiser were elected to three-year terms as trustees. David Peet was re-elected to a two-year term as Treasurer, David Kehrer was re-elected to a two-year term as Recording Secretary, Jeremy Tuke was re-elected to a two-year term as Secretary, Peter Gores was re-elected to a two-year term as Vice President, and Otto Vondrak was re-elected to a two-year term as President. We thank trustees Rob Burz and Mark Wilczek for their years of service to the board. Thank you also to our committee members, and to our museum members who took part in the elections process.

With no objections to the announced results, the ballots were voted to be destroyed at the December trustees meeting.

—Dave Scheiderich, Chairman

2021 PRIORITY PROJECTS

We have several significant milestones to look forward to in 2021. Three important pieces of our collection will be celebrating their 80th birthday including Lehigh Valley caboose 95100 (July), Rochester Gas & Electric GE 45-tonner 1941 (August), and our *Empire State Express* cars (December). As exciting as those anniversaries are, nothing tops what will be the 50th anniversary of our purchase of Industry Depot from the Erie Lackawanna Railway in Oc-

tober 1971. That singular event touched off the establishment of our museum, which has grown in the years since into New York State's largest operating railroad museum. Despite the hardships endured by our organization in the past year due to the effects of the global pandemic, your museum still has an eye toward preservation and the growth of our organization.

Your Board of Trustees has approved a new list of Priority Projects for 2021. These are projects that are considered vital to the growth of our museum, and will be prioritized for funds and resources until they are completed. That doesn't mean other museum projects are not being funded, or aren't considered important. Taking input from our department superintendents and active volunteers, your Board of Trustees narrowed down the candidates to the six projects listed at right. Your contributions will help us cross some of these items off our list in 2021! —O.M.V.

SAND TOWER COMMITTEE

Your museum acquired the sand tower from B&O Lincoln Park Shops in the 1970s. A sand tower is used to store dried sand which is used by locomotives for traction on slippery rails. The parts of our tower have been stored on a trailer in the Construction Yard for many years. The time has come for us to determine if our museum has a use for a sand tower and where

**2021 R&GV
Priority Projects**

The following priority projects have been approved by the Board of Trustees, effective December 3, 2020. Until completed, these projects will be prioritized for funds and resources as required. To contribute, please contact the project manager.

- 1. Complete Repairs to RG&E 8
TARGET: DECEMBER 2022**
—Joe Nugent, Mgr.
- 2. Complete Caboose LV 95100
TARGET: SEPTEMBER 2021**
—Sam Rosenberg, Mgr.
- 3. Complete Caboose Erie C254
TARGET: JUNE 2021**
—Justin Carmona, Mgr.
- 5. Shop West Side Concrete Floor
TARGET: AUGUST 2021**
—Charlie Marks, Mgr.
- 5. Upper Yard Drainage and Slope
TARGET: SEPTEMBER 2021**
—Scott Gleason, Mgr.
- 6. Depot Repairs/Improvements
TARGET: OCTOBER 2021**
—Charlie Marks, Mgr.

**THE \$1300
GARAGE DOOR**

Earlier this season we had an accident where the north garage door was struck by a piece of equipment because someone else had failed to open the door all the way up.

**PLEASE RAISE
DOORS TO
FULL HEIGHT
EVERY TIME**

(We can't afford costly and avoidable repairs like this.)



*This was a costly
accident that could
have been avoided!*



ROCHESTER & GENESEE VALLEY RAILROAD MUSEUM
A 501c3 non-profit educational organization. Write for free brochure or visit rgvrrm.org

to place it; or determine if there is another organization who could put it to better use. This committee has been tasked with coming up with a report before the end of 2021. If you're interested in joining the committee, please contact Charlie Marks.

**YEAR-END GIVING:
PLEASE SUPPORT YOUR MUSEUM**

Museum volunteers worked extremely hard under extraordinary circumstances to help make sure your museum was able to operate an abbreviated season, recoup our expenses, and even come out a little bit ahead in the end. However, your museum is still facing a budget shortfall upwards of \$60,000 that will impact some of our operating plans for the coming year. A donation in any amount will help ensure your museum is able to continue its mission of preserving Rochester's rich railroad heritage for future generations to enjoy. Besides gifts of cash, donations of durable goods and professional services are also appreciated. Donations to our 501c3 non-profit are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law (consult your tax professional for details). —*O.M.V.*

**WELCOME
NEW MEMBERS**

Please join me in welcoming these new members to the museum!

Kristen Waterstram (gift of Gerald Hott), Honeoye Falls, N.Y.

Mark Meyer, Albuquerque, N.M.

William Storrs, Newark, N.Y.

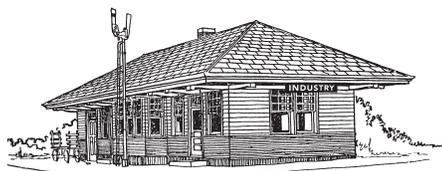
Luke Irvine, Lakeview, N.Y.

—*Sam Rosenberg, Membership Chair*

SAFETY FIRST

Coming out to the museum? Wear a face covering, keep reasonable distance whenever possible, wash your hands, and bring your own hand sanitizer if possible. If you're feeling sick, or you are in a "high-risk" category, please STAY HOME.

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS AND BEST WISHES
FOR A HAPPY NEW YEAR**



VISIT US ONLINE
FACEBOOK.COM/RGVRM
Flickr.COM/RGVRM

The Apprentice Fireman



THIS IS A TRUE STORY about three characters, two engineers and one apprentice fireman. I had connections with the two engineers, but never met them personally. I never even knew the name of the apprentice fireman.

Wally Utech, Sr. was an engineer of the Chicago & Northwestern working out of West Chicago Ill., where I grew up. I knew his son, Wally Jr. who was a few years older than I. When Wally, Jr. joined the railroad, he worked for my dad for a couple of years.

Henry Fain, a very senior engineer, also from West Chicago, was a short, no nonsense, banty-legged Irishman and a duck-hunting buddy of my grandfather, Larry ("Grizzly Ike") Ruth. (Griz used the Irish version of our family name on his railroad paperwork so the bookies could not garnish his wages.) My other connection to Henry Fain was that when he piloted the *City of Portland* streamliner from Chicago to Clinton Iowa, he sometimes turned the train over to Harry Nester, my great-uncle, who took that train to Boone, Iowa.

Wally Utech was temporally assigned to a switching job in Rockford, Ill., to cover for a crew that had gone on vacation. He was partnered with a newly hired fireman who didn't have a clue about how to fire a steam engine. An 0-6-0 switch engine like this was more than ample for the needs of this job and even with an inexperienced fireman.

Wally figured that he could have some fun with the fireman and still get each day's job done in the allotted time. So when the kid's fire got so low that the engine couldn't operate, Wally told him that the problem is that clinkers get stuck in the screen in the smokebox that is there to keep from spewing red-hot pieces of coal all over the countryside. "You need to squeeze out the door of the cab, walk as far as you can to the front of the engine and beat on the side of the smokebox to jar loose the clinkers. Here, take this big wrench."

When the kid was outside thinking he was fixing the problem, Wally dressed up the fire and threw in a few shovelfuls of coal. This happened several times during

their tenure in Rockford. Probably based on the overly kind write-up Wally must have given the kid, he was next assigned to suburban duty.

Suburban commuter trains at that time could be hell for steam firemen, particularly during rush

hour. The locomotives were old hand-me-downs. None had automatic stokers, which meant they were all were manually fired.

Making things worse was the fact that the C&NW operated left-handed in double-track territory. That put the station platforms on left side (the fireman's side) of the engines. Stations were often just a few miles apart, and the schedules were tight, with frequent stops.

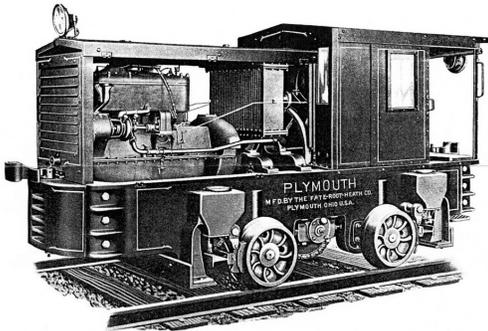
At a station stop, the fireman couldn't tend to the fire until, while waiting in his seat, he could get a "highball" signal from the conductor and could then relay it to the engineer, who was on the wrong side of the engine to see the platform. After that, the fireman had to jump down in the deck and madly throw coal into the firebox.

The kid drew an assignment for an inbound morning rush-hour run from West Chicago that included a stop at Oak Park, where a number of railroad executives lived and took this very train to work. The engineer was the above-mentioned Henry Fain. As one might suspect, the train left each station with less acceleration and was soon running late. Henry began to fume but did not take any drastic actions.

When the train wheezed into Oak Park, the kid said "I know what is wrong Mr. Fain!" He then opened the narrow door in front of his seat, squeezed through it, ran along the boiler and began beating on the side of the smokebox with a wrench, right in front of several railroad executives who had gathered to witness the spectacle.

When he got back into the cab, Henry told him to sit on the fireman's seat and don't move from it. Henry then threw several shovels of the coal into the firebox and the train limped into Chicago. I would suspect that when the kid got to the crew lounge in the basement of the terminal at 400 West Madison Street, his termination papers were waiting for him. —*Mike Root*

PLYMOUTH BL TURNS 100



Catalog image of Plymouth Model BL

ONE OF THE MORE INTERESTING LOCOMOTIVES at our museum has remained largely hidden from public view for the last several years. The year 2020, we believe, marks its 100th birthday. Visitors to our Restoration Shop might have noticed this small yellow piece of rolling stock on Track 7, and wondered about its significance. It turns out that this Plymouth Model BL locomotive has a rather long history connected to our museum and Monroe County.

We were first alerted to the existence of the Plymouth by member Jerry Liederthiel in 1999. It was in a derelict state at the former Odenbach shipyard in Greece. It had been parked in a macadam parking lot, many years prior, and had sunken into the pavement, up to its frame rails. Moderate vandalism and theft were evident, and it had suffered from years of neglect in the elements, but the locomotive was substantially complete. Rand Warner and Jerry Liederthiel arranged for its donation.

That Autumn, it was prepared for shipment by members Kevin Klees, John Redden, Norm Shaddick, and others. This work consisted of gradually raising it out of the macadam, stabilizing it at ground level, cutting the very corroded drive chains, and other miscellaneous work. This took place over a period of several months. It finally arrived at the museum in December 1999.

During the period of 2000 to 2008, the Plymouth underwent a major restoration, during which virtually every single component was removed, inspected and repaired or replaced. This work included the construction of the engine hood and cab, plus several major drivetrain components, almost entirely from scratch. The great majority of this work was done by member



ABOVE: With member Kevin Klees at the throttle, our Plymouth Model BL was demonstrated to the public during our annual Diesel Days event in August 2007. CHRISTOPHER HAUF PHOTO

Kevin Klees, with assistance from various other members. In October 2006, it ran under its own power for the first time in decades. In August 2007, it was demonstrated to the public during our annual Diesel Days event, and that September was run down to Industry Depot for our annual members' picnic. Since that time, the locomotive has been stored inside the shop, awaiting the completion of its restoration.

We have studied the various bits of remaining evidence on the locomotive, in order to determine its history. It arrived at the museum with no serial number, except the one on its Buda prime mover. The loco employs a four-cylinder gasoline engine and a mechanical "friction wheel" transmission, and heavy roller chains as the final drive to its two axles. This is a simple and reliable arrangement, but is considered antiquated by today's standards.

Weighing in at approximately seven tons, our locomotive is one of about 400 Model BLs produced by Plymouth Locomotive Works. Through study of their options and production phases, and the known dispositions of many of these locomotives, we have narrowed the search to approximately forty of the BLs. Included in this group of forty, is serial 969, which was delivered new to New York Central's Despatch Shops in East Rochester in 1920. While we don't have any documented proof, it seems most

likely this is the one in our possession.

In addition, we do know for certain, that the engine resided at the former Odenbach ship building facility since the late 1950s, until its donation in 1999. The Odenbach company constructed landing barges and shallow draft oil tankers for war effort during World War Two. Our theory is that this locomotive was sold to Odenbach during the early years of America's involvement in the in either 1942 or 1943. One possibility was that it was used as a canal "mule" to tow the water vessels through a small canal at the Odenbach yard. The shipyard was taken over by the government in 1951 and turned over to the Air Force and designated Plant 51, where sub-frames for B-29 bombers were fabricated. In 1955, another contractor moved in to build ground-handling equipment for Air Force surface-to-air Talos missiles. The balance of the property was sold in 1961 to the local water authority. The site has since been razed.

In terms of mechanical technology, our Plymouth BL is among the very oldest internal-combustion locomotives in existence anywhere. In addition, it has quite possibly spent its entire one-hundred-year existence in Monroe County. It is a very rare artifact, with unique historical ties to our area. Happy 100th birthday to our little yellow friend! —John Redden



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VIRTUAL MEETING via ZOOM

PLAN AHEAD:
Jan. 21, 2021

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Livonia, Avon & Lakeville 17, Livonia, N.Y., in August 1966. Built by Baldwin in September 1925 as Savannah & Atlanta 504, it was later sold to Buffalo Creek & Gauley and renumbered 17. Sold to LA&L 17 in May 1965, it entered service that November. It was retired in June 1967, sold, and scrapped on March 30, 1970. The Livonia train order semaphore is now installed at Industry Depot. PHOTO BY ALBERT J. KALLFELZ, JR., COLLECTION JEFF HAGAN