

THE SEMAPHORE

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCHESTER & GENESEE VALLEY RAILROAD MUSEUM



VOL. 66 NO. 9
SEPTEMBER 2023

NEXT MEETING:

September 21

Mark Klingel presents "The Railroads that Built the Finger Lakes"



The *Empire State Express* cars depart Industry for the last time on August 29, destined for their new home in Indiana (see page 4). PHOTO BY OTTO M. VONDRAK

Bon Voyage

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It was with mixed emotions of sadness and excitement that I watched the *Empire State Express* cars get pulled from our West Siding by the LA&L road crew on August 29. Besides the decades of enjoyment (and revenue) they brought the museum over the last 25 years or so, I thought back to my very first rides in these cars back in 1982. I was five years old, and my dad was taking me to visit his workshop in New York City. We boarded the train in Katonah, located on the former New York Central Harlem Line, then operated by Conrail for the MTA. The cars were still steam-heated in those days, and I remember wisps of steam escaping from the connections as the train pulled into the station. I would ride these trains many times with my dad until they were replaced by new electric trains in 1984. But I never forgot my first ride! Little did I know I would see these cars again in Rochester...

I am very excited for the future of these cars as Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society has plans to refurbish and operate the train for many years to come. Once again, these cars will be dusted with soot from steam engine exhaust when they are pulled by Nickel Plate 765 thundering down ex-NYC tracks in Indiana.

The decision to sell off the cars was not an easy one for our board. We know there are a few members who aren't happy with the sale. Others have mixed feelings about it. At the end of the day, this was the most responsible decision we could make to ensure the long-term survival — and continued *operation* — of these cars.

Where do you think we should we focus our future efforts at the museum? 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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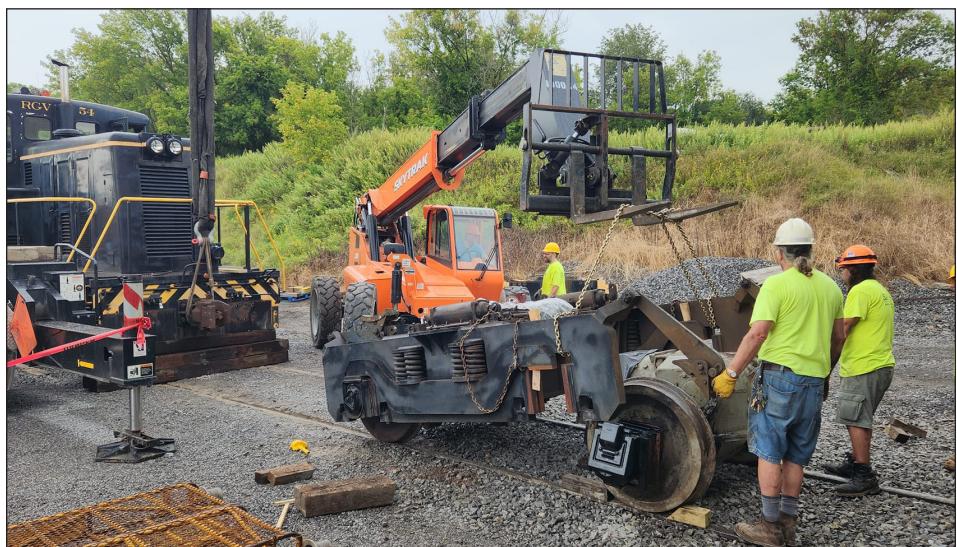
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EDITOR

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TOP: "The Big Lift" took place on September 7 to swap three of the four axles on R&GV 54 with replacement traction motor combos. The C.P.Ward crane lifts one end of the locomotive so the truck can be rolled out. **ABOVE:** We rented a heavy-duty forklift to perform the lift on the truck frames so the new traction motor combo units could be installed. See page 4 for details.

2023 R&GV OPERATING SCHEDULE

Visit RochesterTrainRides.com for tickets and details

- **September 9 - Caboose Day Train Rides**
- **September 16 - Scouting Around Train Rides**
- **September 23 - Oktoberfest Rails & Ales**
- **September 23 - Night Photo Session with Steve Barry**
- **October 14-15 - Pumpkin Patch Train Rides**
- **October 21-22 - Pumpkin Patch Train Rides**
- **October 28-29 - Pumpkin Patch Train Rides**
- **December 8-9 – Santa Train Rides to the North Pole**
- **December 15-16 – Santa Train Rides to the North Pole**

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For our final summer meeting on August 17, we took a “rare mileage” trip north of Midway to New York Museum of Transportation, where we received a private tour of the exhibits and collection. Monthly meetings return to the 40&8 Club in Rochester starting on September 21.

1361 for Railroader’s Heritage Museum in Altoona, Pa., and Florida East Coast 148 restored for U.S. Sugar’s “Sugar Express” excursion operation in Clewiston, Fla.

November 16 will be our Annual Elections and Members’ Slide Night. Members are invited to share their favorite 20 slides or digital images while ballots are tallied.

These events are FREE and open to the public, so bring a friend! Your museum is seeking programs to schedule through the winter and spring months. If you have ideas for future railroad-related programs, please contact me by phone or email.

—Dave Drury,
Program Committee Chair

UPCOMING MONTHLY PROGRAMS

Monthly meetings return to the 40&8 Club, 933 University Ave., Rochester, N.Y. Doors open at 7:00pm, and the meeting begins at 7:30. Cash bar available. Evening programs begin after a brief business meeting. All meetings are FREE to attend and open to the public. Bring a friend!

September 21, photographer **Mark Klingel** returns to present “The Railroads That Built the Finger Lakes.” Mark will share stories and photos from a book he is finishing that features LA&L, B&H, OMID, FGLK, R&S, and Ithaca Central.

October 19, museum member **Roy Wullich III**, Manager of Finance and Operations at FMW Solutions presents “21st Century Solutions to 19th Century Problems.” Some of you probably recall when Roy lived in Rochester and was involved with the museum and fall foliage excursions. His presentation will visit some steam locomotive restoration projects presently managed by FMW including NC&StL 576 for Nashville Steam Preservation Society; PRR K-4

and Penn Central 18526. Other cabooses will be on exhibit as well.

Scouting Around Train Rides on September 16 is a new event designed to encourage attendance. Each Scout in uniform admitted free with a paid adult.

Rails & Ales returns on September 23. This 21 and over event involves complimentary tastings from a dozen local craft breweries. This special event runs from noon to 3pm. Tickets to this 21+ event are \$35 in advance, \$40 at the door, and include museum admission and a free tasting glass.

Tickets for these events are on sale now at www.RochesterTrainRides.com.

NIGHT PHOTO SESSION SEPTEMBER 23

On September 23 at 7:00pm, join us for a special night photo session at the museum that will include several posed scenes and with actors and vintage trains to recreate vignettes of vintage railroading. Planned set-ups include a Lehigh Valley freight train and caboose; a Livonia, Avon & Lakeville freight train and caboose, and a Rochester Gas & Electric switcher at the “power plant.” Equipment and settings subject to change without notice. Lighting will be provided by *Railfan & Railroad* editor Steve Barry. A tripod and a camera capable of long exposures (“bulb” setting) is required. Flashlight and boots with ankle support recommended. Tickets are \$35.00 each and are available online at rgvrrm.org/night-photo-session.

SEPTEMBER TRAIN RIDES

On September 9, your museum is hosting Caboose Day Train Rides, with a special all-caboose consist including Lehigh Valley 95100 (no riders), Erie C254, BR&P 280,

THE BIG LIFT: SWAPPING AXLES ON R&GV 54

A couple months ago, it was discovered that one of the axles on R&GV 54 had a bad bearing. Without repairs, there was risk the axle could seize up and cause even more damage to the locomotive. Since R&GV 54 is our primary diesel, we did not want to risk further damage, and the locomotive was immediately taken out of service while a plan for repair was made.

Two of the four motors on R&GV 54 were damaged in transit when the locomotive was delivered to us at the end of 2001. The locomotive was rewired to work on the two remaining motors and has provided us with more than 20 years of reliable service. Several years ago, two traction motor "combos" were purchased with the idea that someday we would swap out the two burned out motors for the good ones. Since that time, not only have we increased the frequency of our train operation, but we have also built up our shop facilities to keep up with maintenance and repairs as a result. When problems developed with R&GV 54, we were prepared to solve them.

September 7 was the date set to perform the axle swaps. We made a reservation with C.P. Ward for a crane and operator, and a heavy duty forklift was rented from Admar to assist. Some of the advance prep

ABOVE RIGHT: Several students from RIT were helping Charlie Marks prepare the New York Central caboose for a fresh coat of paint on September 2.

RIGHT: Dave Luca works on freeing up the bolster on Rochester Subway Car 60. Repairs need to be made as part of the reconstruction of the rear vestibule. This car was built in 1916 by Cincinnati Car Co. and served the Utica Lines until 1933. The 12-car fleet was moved to Rochester in 1938 and served until the Subway was closed in 1956.

BETWEEN: On August 15, Charles Rothbart recruited the help of retired Conrail signal maintainer Tom Guile to help repair the semaphore signal that guards the northbound route up the Hill Block.



work included cleaning and painting four new journal boxes; removing pilot plates, steps, pedestal binders, and slack adjusters; disconnecting traction motor cables, sander lines, air hoses, hand brake chains, and speedometer cables; removing traction motor suspension bolts; new journal box dust guards fabricated by a local vendor; new journal pads custom made by Pacific Journal Pad in Washington state; temporary thrust bearings machined from aluminum by Bill Marcotte; and many other tasks.

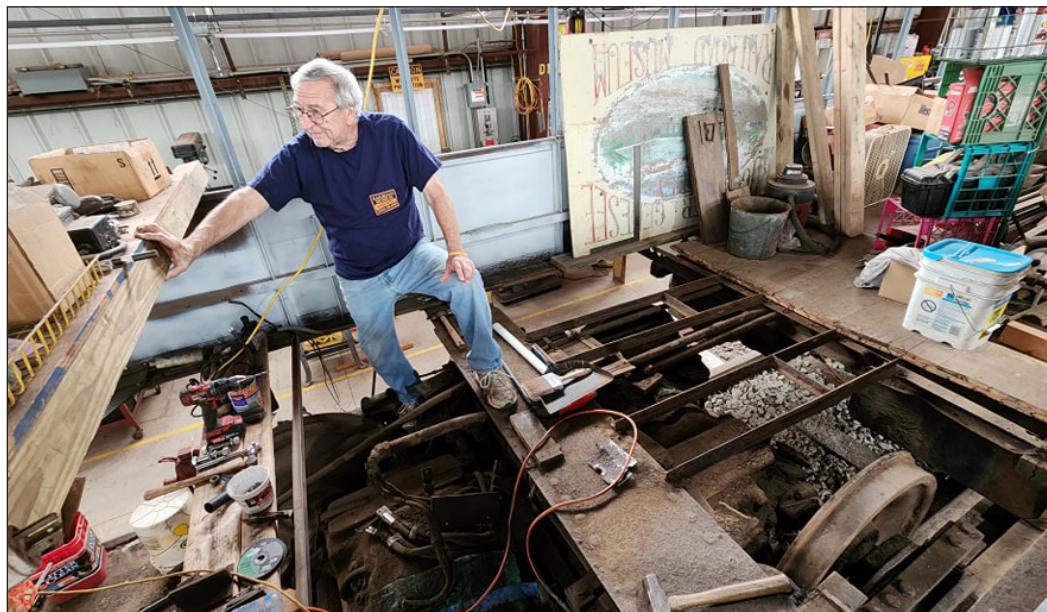
Work began at 7:00am, with volunteers working through 6:00pm to finish the job before it got dark. The end result not only solves the issue of the failing bearing, but also restores the diesel switcher to "full power" with four functioning motors (one on each axle)! This work is a testament not

only to our volunteers' skill, but also our ability to plan and successfully execute complex projects like these. Once all the components are reconnected and tested, R&GV 54 will return to active service.

So many people contributed to today's success, among them Joe Nugent, Sam Rosenberg, Justin Carmona, Scott Gleason, Jeremy Tuke, Bill Marcotte, Mark Bowen, Jim Johnson, David Scheiderich, Luther Brefo, our patient crane operator from C.P. Ward, and others. Your support as a member makes all this possible! —O.M.V.

EMPIRE CARS DEPART FOR FORT WAYNE

As part of an ongoing investment in its new rail tourism program, the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society has acquired





seven former *Empire State Express* streamlined passenger cars from the Rochester & Genesee Valley Railroad Museum in Rochester, N.Y. Once part of the New York Central Railroad's famous "Great Steel Fleet" of passenger trains, the collection is now destined to regularly appear behind restored steam and diesel locomotives from the 1940s and 50s.

Built in 1941 for use on the *Empire State Express*, a flagship first-class passenger train of the New York Central, the cars will operate over former New York Central trackage in Indiana and Michigan. Restoration of the fleet is estimated to cost over 1.2 million dollars, with plans to fund the work through donations, grants, and ongoing ticket sales over the next several ensuing years. The organization's first goal is to raise \$160,000 in order to place one coach in service in 2024. A capital campaign has been launched at greatsteelfleet.org.

"This acquisition will ensure we have a dedicated fleet of our own equipment for both the Indiana Rail Experience and future steam excursions around the country and helps strengthen our business model," said Joe Knapke, President of the Fort Wayne Railroad. "Rochester's care and stewardship in preserving this equipment through the years means that the cars will be enjoyed by thousands of people every year."

The streamlined *Empire State Express* operated between New York City, Detroit, and Cleveland, and each of the preserved cars debuted in the inaugural run on December 7th, 1941 – only hours before the attack on Pearl Harbor. In later years, they were rebuilt for commuter service. Six cars

from the fleet were acquired by the Rochester Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society in 1987 and made part of their growing museum collection where it was later joined by a railway post office car to complete the set. Refurbished by volunteers, the cars were used for a series of seasonal fall foliage excursions operated in the region through the 1990s and early 2000s, with the most recent trip taking place in 2019.

"These cars were state of the art when introduced and are beautiful examples of innovative, stainless steel construction during a period of optimism and investment in passenger rail," said Otto Vondrak, president of RGVRM. "These lightweight, stainless steel cars set the standard for a generation of the traveling public. The Budd Company built these cars to last and they are destined for a bright future," detailed Vondrak.

Over the next several years, the cars will undergo modernization of their mechanical, heating, and electric systems and additional work will update restrooms and seating. Two cars are likely candidates for conversion into first-class cars dining or parlor cars inspired by the New York Central's original designs. The acquisition of the equipment was partially funded by a grant from the David A. Donoho Trust and the Central Indiana Foundation.

"Not many organizations have the resources to acquire, maintain, and operate a full seven-car passenger train, let alone one single car," Vondrak said. "After a long career in preservation, RGVRM determined this train to be surplus to the museum's collection. I'm proud of our museum's ac-



Classic Cars & Train Rides

ABOVE: "Genny Bob" brought his Ford pick-up truck that has been painted to look like a vehicle you might see around the Genesee Brewery back in the day.

LEFT: A 1951 Packard poses with our 1949 Alco during Classic Cars & Train Rides on August 19.

complishments in preserving this historic train set, and our members are excited for its future. We can't wait to see this classic streamliner operate with a powerful steam engine across the farmlands of the Midwest as they first did 82 years ago."

Since the 1980s, the Fort Wayne Railroad has operated passenger excursions and public exhibition trains with restored Nickel Plate Road steam locomotive no. 765, often leasing privately owned passenger cars in order to accommodate the general public and make excursions financially viable. Since 2022, the organization has purchased two former Pennsylvania Railroad coaches, completed the restoration of a dining car and open-air car, converted a former baggage car into a power car to provide electricity for its trains, and also acquired an unrestored Canadian Pacific dome-observation-lounge car.

"With rising costs, limited availability, and logistical constraints, leasing even the best cars can make or break this business," detailed Kelly Lynch, Vice President of the Fort Wayne Railroad. "We've gone from having no operating cars to a growing fleet in less than two years. As the Empire cars enter service over time, they will greatly expand our train sizes, capacity, and variety of trips, which means donations toward restoring our fleet can double and triple the impact our trains have."

FWRHS also recently purchased a former New York Central depot in Pleasant Lake, Ind., to support the Indiana Rail Experience, an ongoing partnership between the non-profit and the Indiana Northeastern Railroad Company, a privately-owned 100-



FORT WAYNE RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

**Great
STEEL FLEET**

ABOVE: Dave Shields and Bob Cowan pose with the *Empire State Express* cars just prior to their departure on August 29. Dave and Bob are among the dozens of volunteers who regularly worked on these cars to keep them in top operating condition for many years.

TOP RIGHT: After picking up the Empire cars at Industry, LA&L makes its way north at East River Road.

RIGHT: After picking up two boxcars at Diamond Packaging in Henrietta, the LA&L road freight makes its way west along the West Shore Branch towards the interchange at Genesee Junction. The Empire cars are destined for the Fort Worth Railroad Historical Society in New Haven, Ind.

mile short line railroad. Earlier this year, the program was named Indiana's Best New Experience by the state tourism bureau for its impact on the region.

"In addition to boosting the local economy, we are planting the seeds for an immersive, linear cultural experience, where the passenger cars, stations, and locomotives are all from the same era, if not from the very same historic railroad," said Lynch. "There are compelling models throughout the world that demonstrate how a tourist railroad can create an enduring sense of place and improve an area's quality of life, and the Indiana Rail Experience hopes to build on these great examples and our own accomplishments so far."

The historic passenger car set departed Industry on Tuesday, August 29. Zach Hall



from FWRHS was on hand to shadow the movement of the cars and assure there were no last-minute mechanical issues. The Livonia, Avon & Lakeville road freight arrived around 1:00pm to make the pickup. Once the engines tied on and built up air, the passenger cars were added to the freight consist and made their way north. The crew made a brief stop in Henrietta to pick up two boxcars from Diamond Packaging, adding them ahead of the passenger cars. Soon the train made its way through Henrietta, turning west onto the old New York Central West Shore Branch before they were dropped at Genesee Junction for interchange to CSX.

The next day, the cars were picked up by the CSX local and brought to Goodman Street Yard. By Thursday they were moving west to Buffalo. On Friday, the cars moved

on Train M565 from Buffalo to Cleveland, where they were handed off to Norfolk Southern. On Saturday, September 2, the cars were scheduled to be picked up to make their way to Indiana and the FWRHS facility in New Haven. —*Press Release*

CONRAIL CABOOSE 21273 ARRIVES AT RGV

I am pleased to announce that Rochester & Genesee Valley Railroad Museum new home for Conrail caboose 21273! This car was located in Buffalo and was scheduled to be scrapped by the end of the month. Member Adam Lloyd stepped in to acquire the car and arrange safe over-the-road transport by Winters Rigging.

The caboose is part of Class N-21, the only series built new for Conrail in 1978 by



LEFT: Winters Rigging transported and landed former Conrail caboose 21273 on August 31. Member Adam Lloyd was able to acquire this car to save it from being scrapped in Buffalo. Overall the condition is quite good, and we look forward to integrating this car into our exhibits in 2024.

TRAIN SHOW CHAIRMAN URGENTLY NEEDED

- Appearances at local train shows are just one way we promote our museum activities, solicit donations, and attract new members. We are seeking a Train Show Chairman to help coordinate our appearances at these events.
- The Chairman would be responsible for identifying local shows, making reservations for table space, submitting required payments, coordinating volunteer staffing and arranging for museum materials to be transported and set up at the show. The position of Chairman is a manager role for you to coordinate and delegate responsibilities. If you are interested in helping your museum grow, please contact Otto Vondrak at ovondrak@yahoo.com.

—Otto Vondrak, Museum President

Fruit Growers Express in Alexandria, Va. The caboose arrived on August 31, and we look forward to integrating it into our museum operations in 2024! I had been hoping to include this car as a new exhibit for our Caboose Day Train Rides on September 9, but logistics dictated the car be parked on the West Siding for now. Once our switch is restored, we look forward to bringing this car over to the museum side as soon as possible. —O.M.V.

MUSEUM SAFETY: FALL PROTECTION

If you have been in the Restoration Building recently on the west side at the north end you may have seen one of the lockers labeled for “FALL PROTECTION EQUIPMENT.” All fall protection equipment

has been stored here. The second line is the most important one, you must be trained to use it. So what is it, when do you need it, and why training is required? If you are working from the bucket on the bucket truck or standing on a surface (other than an appropriately used ladder) and you are



higher than 6 ft. in the air (measured at your feet) you are required to have fall protection and a trained spotter.

Let me first address the bucket truck as it is the simplest, if you are in the bucket, you must have a properly fitting harness attached to the bucket with a 3 ft. lanyard, the lanyard and harness are in the locker. If you are working on something higher, let's say on the roof of a rail car, you must have a properly fitting harness with the 6 ft. lanyard, attached to the life line, which is properly attached to a beam above the rail car, and a spotter on the ground. Here training is required for proper fit of the harness, proper set up and attachment of the life line and the lanyard to the harness and the beam. Please note the spotter also needs to be trained in this equipment, as if you should fall he or she needs to know how to get you down. Note, a fit check by a trained individual must be performed on the person using the harness before using the harness. Please do not attempt to use the equipment if you have not received training at the museum.

Should you intend to use this equipment and need training, please contact either myself or Charlie Marks. I remind you that using this equipment without proper training can be dangerous. If you are trained and use the equipment properly the last step is when finished to make sure equipment is clean and returned to the locker. If you note any problems with the equipment, please notify Charlie or myself. We will be maintaining the correct inspections on this equipment so that it is ready for your use, but if you have plans to use we would appreciate to be informed in advance as to who will be using it and who will be the spotter. If you have any questions, please contact Charlie Marks (cmarks@frontiernet.net) or Ernie Cole (mrmmt1969@hotmail.com). ☹

—Ernie Cole, Safety Manager

THE SEMAPHORE

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NEXT MEETING:

Aug. 17, 2023

282 RUSH-SCOTTSVILLE RD., RUSH N.Y.

PLAN AHEAD:

Sept. 21, 2023

933 UNIVERSITY AVE., ROCHESTER, N.Y.

Find us on Facebook! facebook.com/rgvrrm



THE BIG LIFT: On September 7, volunteers successfully swapped out three of the four axles on R&GV 54. The 80-ton General Electric switcher was delivered to us in 2001 with two of its four motors damaged in transport. This effort not only corrects a failing bearing, but restores all four motors to full operation. This unit was originally built for the U.S. Army in 1959, and was fully rebuilt in 1989. See page 4 for details. OTTO M. VONDRAK PHOTO