



The Westconn Manifest

The Monthly Newsletter of the
Western Connecticut Chapter of the
National Railway Historical Society



www.westctnrhs.org

Since 1953

September 2004

Train watching at the SoNo Railroad Switch Tower Museum - Sunday September 12, 2004



Metro-North FL-9 2008 passes by the Tower on it's way to Danbury.



A special Metro-North excursion train with NH Genesis 230 on the head end.



The engineer blew his horn and passengers waived to the Tower operators and visitors.



The excursion consisted of 2 vintage 1949 Erie Lackawanna "Phoebe Snow" observation cars - MN #2 on the rear.

THE WESTCONN MANIFEST

is the official newsletter of the Western Connecticut Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society – (NRHS).

Articles which appear in

THE WESTCONN MANIFEST

do not express official NRHS position unless specifically noted as such.

Material from **THE WESTCONN MANIFEST** may be reprinted in other publications, provided the credit is given.

Please address comments, any contributions of material, complaints and exchange copies of other chapter newsletters to:

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The Western Connecticut Chapter of the NRHS is separately incorporated as a CT not-for-profit corporation.

The Chapter is involved in the preservation of American railroad history and artifacts.

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The Chapter meets monthly, usually on the 4th Monday, at the United Congregational Church 275 Richards Ave. in Norwalk, CT or at the SoNo Switch Tower Museum 77 Washington St. Norwalk, CT at 8 P.M.

Meeting dates for 2004:

1/26, 2/23, 3/22, 4/26, 5/24*, 6/28*, 7/26*, 8/23*, **9/27***, 10/25, 11/22 and 12/20.

*Chapter meeting to held at the SoNo Switch Tower in South Norwalk, CT

The SoNo Switch Tower Museum is maintained and operated by volunteers of the Western Connecticut Chapter.

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First Builder's Plate Convention

By Bob Briechele

This past weekend (Sept. 10-13), I attended the first Builder's Plate Convention hosted by the Ohio Central Railroad in Coshocton, OH, roughly a two hour drive south of my home in NE Ohio. It was several of you on this list who informed me about the convention and I dithered about for several months wondering why I should go as the 1200-plate collection of mine (dating back to 1863 with plates from 26 countries) was sold off about 15 years ago. But email correspondence with John Corns, Ohio Central employee who had been charged with doing this by OC Chairman and CEO Jerry Joe Jacobson, convinced me to go. Jerry Joe was there for the full three days.

There were 48 attendees all told including one from Chile (an American expatriate), one from the UK, one from Seattle, a number from the East Coast, etc. Each attendee was required to bring two plates for the display boards in the meeting room. A full day of talks given by select attendees kept everyone's attention. Tim Moore spoke for nearly an hour on Baldwin plates and variations, Ron Muldowney spoke on Class Plates (from PRR, B&O, KCS, CNR, CPR, and N&W), Martin Hansen from Bend, OR, who specializes in logging railroads, spoke at length about how to spot fake plates. There was a speaker who addressed casting plates, reproductions, for legitimate reasons (e.g. to replace items stolen from the Strasburg RR in recent years, to replace plates for the locos at Cass that were missing over the years). Harold Davies spoke about very early builder's plates and pitched his forthcoming book with photos of some 230 US plates and more of the locomotives they came from. Another chap displayed and spoke about builder's plate molds he acquired from Baldwin after they were shut down, I spoke about my own collection which, at the time, was thought to have been the largest in the world, as to why I sold it, and what my perspective was on exiting that stage of my life, the need to insure that plates ended up in 'safe' places and not tucked away in museums in storage, etc. All of us told stories about the plates that we brought--I told the story of what my experiences were in gifting my last two plates--acquired from the New Zealand Government Railways--to museum operations in New Zealand as well as how I got started. All attendees spoke one by one about their two plates and how they got into the hobby.

The entire day's sessions were videotaped and I hope to get a tape (or DVD) of the entire 'show'. That evening, we were treated to a ride behind an Ohio Central 4-6-2 (ex-Canadian ownership) to their shops where other steam locos of their's (they have 14 in all) were stored, as well as diesels, old and new--they have 85 diesels all told, most of them relatively new (secondhand-acquired) and in regular service on their 175 miles of railroad all over Ohio. I skipped the Sunday trip.

It was an outstanding convention for a very small and very select community of blokes, many of whom knew one another--if not in person--from trading and communicating over the years. There will possibly be a repeat in the future but, as with high school reunions, the question is when and how often. It's not cheap to attend--they charged \$99 for the convention which included two meals, refreshments, the convention setting in a local hotel, and two train trips behind steam--cheap enough. That plus lodging, about 350 miles of driving, incidental meals and expenses ran me to about \$400. It was much more, of course, for those who had to fly in from elsewhere. For me, it was only about a two-hour drive. Not everyone has budget flexibility to allow this sort of thing every year. And the hobby is somewhat static now with new locomotives built with decals for plates instead of bronze, cast iron, stainless steel sheet, aluminum plates that are bolted on to a loco. Nonetheless, there wasn't a collector there who did not see something for the first time that he or she had not known to exist.

A good experience all around!

ADVENTURES WITH CNJ 1137

By "Add" Austin (Reprinted from THE TORPEDO, Southwest Florida Chapter, NRHS)

Back in 1969 and 1970 I was very deeply involved in the formation of the Valley Railroad, the steam tourist line in Essex, Connecticut. At about the same time the bankrupt Central Railroad of New Jersey was selling off its assets. I drove down to their yard near the Newark Airport, selected a passenger car, their 1137, and asked how much. There was no set price; I was to make a bid.

Back at my office, I mailed in a bid of \$350.00. I soon got a phone call that the bid was rejected, not enough, so I asked how much the bid should be to get the car. This time I got an answer, "At least \$750.00." I sent them a bid of \$750.00 and became the owner of CNJ 1137.

Then, and maybe still, when you bought a car the railroad would deliver it free to any point on their line or to an interchange point. Since I wanted the car delivered to Saybrook, CT, it was sent Penn Central.

Back in the days of the New Haven Railroad, their main office was in their own building a block or two from the New Haven station. Penn Central just moved in and even kept the same phone number. The switchboard there could connect you with any phone on the line if you knew the extension. In connection with the Valley Railroad, I talked with the freight agent in Windsor Locks, CT, a couple of times, just by calling New Haven.

When three or so weeks had passed and my car had not shown up at Saybrook, I called the office in New Haven. I was turned over to the operator of an early computer. When I gave her the car number it took her only a few seconds to report that the car was in the Selkirk, NY, yard with a broken coupler and that they did not have the proper one to fix it. No explanation as to why I had not been called. I called CNJ, bought the coupler, and had it shipped to Selkirk.

After some more weeks passed and no car, I called again. This time it did not show up on the computer, but they would call me back. I got the call late in the day. When CNJ sold the car, they white-lined it, that is, they painted a white line through the number indicating that they no longer owned it. Penn Central had a train of old NY&NH cars, plus others, that were white-lined and put on a scrap train to the cutters in Ashtabula, Ohio. Since my car was white-lined, it had been put on that train. It had not yet been cut up and it was put on the next train back. It made it to Saybrook in a few days. As a result of its travels it had been the target of a lot of rock throwing vandals and hardly had a window left, plus there was other damage.

I had acquired a partner in the car who was going to help with the restoration. He was also the treasurer of Emory Air Freight and was very able to make out and file claim forms against Penn Central for the damage resulting from the Ohio trip. We quickly got a reply from Penn Central saying they recognized the claim, but because they were in bankruptcy they could not pay it. However, if at some point in the future funds became available, the claim would be paid. To my surprise, almost ten years later I got a check from Penn Central.

With a lot of hours of work, the car was restored and numbered as the Valley's 1101. If I say so myself, it was the finest car on their early trains. It has more recently again been renumbered and I don't know the new number.

In the past years while viewing the History Channel on TV I have seen Number 1137 show up twice in movies of WWII troop trains. It didn't say so, but I would guess that the move was between Camp Dix (now Fort Dix) and the military docks on the NJ side of NY Harbor.

A year or so after I got the car, I did a track hike on the "west side line" near Haverstraw, NY, which included an illegal (and maybe not too smart) walk through the tunnel. The track made an "S" turn in the tunnel which must have put a fair amount of strain on the couplers of any cars going through as there were some numbers of broken ones along the underground right-of-way. I can't help but think one of those was mine, as it was the track No. 1137 would have used to reach Selkirk.

UPDATE

In response to an e-mail request for information, J. David Conrad of Valley Railroad Company advises that former CNJ #1137 is now Valley Railroad Co. No. 1001. The car was renumbered a few years ago to put it in sequence with former CNJ #1000, now Valley Railroad No. 1000. There is one more CNJ coach in their fleet. It is #1002.

No. 1001 is presently used in Valley Railroad's passenger service. It is described as an attractive car with a wood paneled interior and green plush seats.



Photo credit Dana Laird

The Old Tuckahoe, New Jersey Railroad Station Aug. 21, 2004
(Note old switch tower in background)

The South Jersey Railroad Museum is at a different location and is open
Wednesdays and Sundaye from 11- 3.

Check out their web site at: www.sjrails.org



Moveable Point Frog Switch

By Add Austin

After leaving the Minneapolis N.R.H.S. convention, we headed north and west to explore much of Midwest and western Canada and the U.S.A. One of the rail items, or at least a new one to me, was a "movable point frog switch/turn out on the UP. This device has a couple of great advantages, even at first glance, the heavy wear and tear on the point of a conventional frog is eliminated. Also eliminated is the need for a guard rail mounted on the inside rail opposite the frog to prevent derailments. While I am sure a load of coal couldn't care less, it provides the same smooth ride that a spring frog does, but the spring frog does it in only one direction, usually straight ahead only. Of course, this new design requires maintenance in the form of lubrication and probably more, plus it needs heat in snow and freezing conditions just as the rest of the switch does. We observed these on UP's three track main leaving eastern Wyoming and into Nebraska from US 26, a highway that stays right next to the UP tracks. This is a very busy line with a constant stream of unit trains with Wyoming coal. Most, but not all of the coal cars were aluminum. Just about all had private X markings. All the UP locomotives were late model safety cabs and about half had the now in use again blue wings on the UP shield. Radio controlled pushers on many trains. US 26 had a steady traffic of white UP highrails and other service vehicles.



Note Concrete ties, no fire hazard from winter heaters. Except it would appear that the heater is remote and only hot air goes to the point - also would save grease.

Photo credits:
Add Austin

Cody, Wyoming

Several years ago, I had the pleasure of a cab ride on the BN daily freight from the dead end at Cody up to Frannie, WY and back. I feared the line might be abandoned by now. I was exploring the site of a WWII Japanese internment camp at Heart Mountain, east of Cody, when I heard a whistle down the track and paced the train for a while headed toward Cody, then pulled ahead to photo the train at a dirt road crossing. Since I was in the middle of no where, the engineer stopped the train to talk with this crazy railfan. It turns out that far from being abandoned, this line has become even busier. The daily train now goes to a farther point and the crew stays overnight, while a second train is making the run back to Cody, both going the opposite way the next day.

The harvest of some grain was soon to start and they would be busier than ever. The big concern was a rumor that Montana Rail Link might soon purchase the line. Power on this train was a blue EMD lease unit and a Santa Fe unit, and of all things, a caboose!



NEW PHOTO EXHIBIT OPENS AT THE DANBURY RAILWAY MUSEUM



Ira Pollack, President of the Danbury Railway Museum introduces Peter McLachlan.

Peter has always had a strong love of trains and started working on the railroad at the age of 18. He began in Cedar Hill Yard near New Haven, CT where he would work on the electric locomotives that came in for service. He cleaned the windows, swept the floors, and supplied the engines with the proper colored flags, which the train crews used to signal each other. At the age of 21 he became a locomotive fireman. In September of 1965, Peter became qualified as an engineer, a childhood dream come true!

A reception was held on Friday, September 10th at 7:00pm for the official opening of Peter McLachlan's Photographic exhibit:

Changing Tracks The Penn Central Railroad 1969-1976

A photographic history of a volatile period of time illustrated through the work of engineer Peter McLachlan.

Photos by Robert Gambling



Ed Albanetti admiring the photos as they tell their story.



Pete, taking the time to talk with one of the Museum members as others admire his work.

In his career, Peter worked for many corporations: The New Haven, Penn Central, Conrail, and the Housatonic. He also ran trains under Amtrak and Metro-North, but was never employed by those companies.

He ran all types of locomotives, mostly diesel and electric and twice steam.

Peter comments, "I am proud of having baan a locomotive engineer, the best career, the best line to work for - The New Haven Railroad!:"

Congratulations, Peter on a great exhibit!

National Director Musings – Tony White

After attending five Director Meetings, I've noticed that the National is seriously keeping track of its incoming and outgoing monies. Recently each Chapter had to fill out its dues structure for the National so that they can send membership bills directly to the members. This made the officers of our Chapter think of our money situation.

Our current income has not kept pace with the price of goods, insurance, rent, stamps, etc. We have several members who have donated their time to make us viable by working in the tower. Through the hard work of the Tower Committee and volunteers, the tower is getting closer to breaking even. Our Editor has been donating the paper, envelopes and ink to make our newsletter the wonderful product that it is. Some members have donated generously to the chapter and/or tower to help defray our costs. Many of you have donated to the Tower with the purchase of levers and all of the levers have been bought. I thank all of you who are supporting the Chapter. "Thank-you!"

How can we resolve the money problem? Members can reach into their pockets and make an annual donation to the Chapter. Remember that any donations to the chapter can be used as a deduction on your taxes as we are a non-profit organization.

Members of course can help by stopping by the Tower and purchasing Gift Shop items. We have Tower hats, Tower sport shirts and Tower T-shirts as well as other Tower items. Those not living in the area can make arrangements via mail order at: giftshop@westctnrhs.org or by mail.

The current price for our Chapter annual membership is \$8.00. It has been \$8.00 for a very long time. Consider what you would be willing to pay for your membership in this chapter. Consider what you would be willing to give to keep the Chapter strong, the New Haven Switch Tower (SS 44) Museum going strong, and the NYNH&H railroad history alive. Please think about this and get back to me. I can be reached via email at nationaldirector@westctnrhs.org. Any of the officers, Gift Shop manager and Tower Chairman can also be reached by mailing to 77 Washington Street, Norwalk, CT 06854.

The next Directors' Meeting will be held in Utica, NY, October 21st through 24th and is sponsored by the Utica & Mohawk Valley Chapter. There will be two trips and the meeting. The Friday trip will be a tour of the NYS&W's shops, Union station and a trip on the Cooperstown & Charlotte Valley Railroad. The Saturday trip will be on the Adirondack Scenic and will include rare mileage. On Saturday evening there will be the banquet at the Hotel Utica. The Directors Meeting will held be Sunday morning. If you are interested in taking any of these trips or attending the meeting, please contact me.

I have sent a "Thank-you" letter to the Amherst Railway Society, Inc for their grant of \$750.00 to be used in either obtaining and restoring the original model board for the tower or constructing a replica. We have made many attempts to get the original board and have received photos showing its current condition, but thus far the person(s) that have it have not responded as to how we might obtain it. Therefore, we are going to recreate a model board that will have operating properties to demonstrate its functioning and educate the public better on what happened in our switch tower. We will keep you updated on our progress.

Now Available in the SoNo Tower Gift Shop:

In The Shore Line Shadow

The Six Lives of the Danbury and Norwalk Railroad
By L. Peter Cornwall

An interesting story of one of Connecticut's first railroads, including local Norwalk History.
Learn about the triumphs and struggles of these early colorful railroads.

Tower Operators for August 2004

Robert Gambling	54 Hours	John Garofalo	48 Hours
Bob Westerfield	30 Hours	Jim Mescher	24 Hours
Buck Neulinger	18 Hours	David Squires	18 Hours
Janet Neulinger	18 Hours	Anthony Gruerio	12 Hours
Roberta Ballard	12 Hours	John Ireland	12 Hours
Tony White	12 Hours	Beth Siegelbaum	12 Hours
Tim Shields	6 Hours	John Miller	6 Hours
Nate Neulinger	6 Hours	Tim Shields	6 Hours
Ed Holowinko	6 Hours	Dana Laird	6 Hours

**Become a “Tower Operator”
It’s an experience you will never forget!**

The Sono Switch Tower Museum

We are only open on Saturday’s and Sunday’s
May thru October from noon until 5 PM.

**Please help us show the Tower and how it operated
to the public.**

To volunteer, contact Jim Mescher at:
(201) 391-7362 or sign up at the Tower.
Thank you.



The Western Connecticut Chapter, NRHS Inc. supports Operation Lifesaver

**Our Next Chapter meeting will be
Monday, September 27, 2004 - 8:00 P.M. at:
At The Sono Switch Tower
77 Washington Street Norwalk, CT**



Entertainment this month will be provided by:



John Ireland



Bob Gambling will provide refreshments.

Annual Chapter picnic Sunday September 26 at Bear Mountain Boat Dock