

Stockton  
Chautauque County Historical Society

At the close of the annual meeting last October and after listening to the very interesting presentations, it was suggested that we from Northern Chautauqua County would like to have a paper prepared on a subject the memory of which is very dear to our hearts:

The Old "Erie to Buffalo Accomodation".

Having been all during my childhood very close to old time railroading, I took it upon myself to do this.

While this may and probably will not be of so much interest to many of you from Southern Chautauqua County, I still feel that many have had occasion to enjoy or remember someone who has enjoyed and benefited by trips to and from Buffalo through connections over the old J. W., Pennsy, and D. A. V. & P. lines.

In getting together the information which I did not have at hand, dates, etc., I have found many interesting things concerning old Railroading. In fact, so much has been suggested to me by elderly people whom I have contacted that, although it was very interesting to me, it would be very long and boring to you had I included all of it.

In looking over some old papers of my father's who was a railroad man all his life I came across a clipping from the Jamestown Journal dated Jan. 16, 1915 entitled "Always a Chautauquan".

Phin Miller's address before a Railroad men's dinner in New York City was a tribute to his native Chautauqua County. He, as many of you remember, was a Stockton boy. He refers to the Railroad that we oldtimers remember--I quote:

"Regardless of corporate names, so long as the waters of the Great Lakes winds its way unmolested to the seas, so long will live in the several states through which it passes the name of the "Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway." unquote.

This was the railroad name we knew and were familiar with for many years, although it was then a branch of the New York Central System.

Early in 1900 the name L. S. & M. S. was discontinued and from then on known as the New York Central Railroad.

The first railroad through our northern Chautauqua County was known as the Buffalo & State Line Railroad. It was put in operation about 1852 and was supposed to connect with the Erie and North East Railroad at State Line, but there was considerable delay in getting the franchise and during that time the end of the run was at State Line, the trains being turned on a Y at Ripley. I have been informed by an old Ripley Resident that the Y extended north from the present line coming nearly down to the intersection in the center of the village. During the wait for the connection, which was caused by the Road in Pennsylvania being a narrow gauge track, there was a small Railroad war a few miles over the Pennsylvania line. This was due to the fact that it was expected that passengers, mail, express, baggage, etc. would have to be transferred from one train to another and each place was expecting an increased amount of business from this. However, it was settled by standard gauge track being put in in Pennsylvania.

During this interval of waiting for the connection the mails were carried from Ripley to Erie on horseback by Henry Gay and passengers were changed to stage coach. However, the franchise was granted and about 1853 runs were made from Buffalo to Erie uninterrupted.

About this time the State Line Bridge, commonly referred to by us as the "Arch", was built. A wooden bridge had been built to carry the then one-track railroad. This stone arch was built over the wood bridge and all the labor of filling in the great

space across the "20 mile" was done by men with paddy wheel barrows. To the generation of today who watch the modern steam shovels in operation, this would seem like a fairy tale but it was accomplished by the noble Irishmen who at that time were settling in the railroad towns. I remember eight or ten of these kindhearted neighbors of my early childhood, some of whom were the parents of some of Chautauqua County's most honored citizens.

Shortly after this time the Erie to Buffalo accomodation was put in operation.

From a timetable dated July 14, 1856, the train left Erie at 6:40 A. M. and arrived in Buffalo at 10:40 A. M. It left Buffalo at 4:10 P. M. and arrived in Erie at 8:10 P. M. This was practically the same schedule all down through the years until the train was discontinued Feb. 1, 1935.

This was a friendly train, a train where rich or poor, laborer or business executive, young or old were really, during that trip, a happy family.

On leaving Erie it usually was made up of a baggage and express car, a smoker and at least one day coach. Usually another coach was added at Dunkirk. The kindest and most lovable of brakemen was Charley Snyder who hardly missed a run for many years until sickness and death took him at a ripe old age. I can still see his twinkling eyes and kindly smile as he helped us on the train and the curtesy and tolerance and good nature of the conductors for many years Al Slaudecker and Sid Bailey.

The train stopped at every station, Wesleyville, Harborscreek, Moorheadville, North East, State Line, Ripley, Forsythe, Westfield, W. Portland, Portland, Brocton, Dunkirk, and so on down the line to Buffalo.

Do any of you recall the distinct call of Charley Snyder, 'The next station at which this train stops is Dunkirk' and then, as we started to slow down for the station, he came in again and called, 'Dunkirk, Dunkirk, change cars for the Dunkirk, Allegheny & Pittsburgh Railroad to Jamestown, Warren, Titusville, Oil City and Pittsburgh. Don't forget your packages.'

At Ripley I think they always looked and waited if any last minute passengers were coming up the street with coat tails flying, or perhaps a family like ours, children ahead and the elders hurrying along. I recall one time the brakeman put me in the cab of the locomotive and I rode there to Westfield. Another time he put my brother and me in the baggage car where we played with two setter dogs.

But the train was seldom late on arriving in Buffalo as they had a speedy little engine and could pick up and make good time and, as I said before, this was a family train and the crew looked for the familiar faces in the early morning all down along the line. From a 50-year old article in the Dunkirk Observer, Westfield was famed for having the largest crowd waiting for the accomodation mail each night and Ripley for having the most people out to meet the train, and we did as far back as I can remember, and especially during the so-called "Gay '90's". Ripley had to look out for their own amusement so "let's go to the accomodation" was something to do. No one knew especially what, but something amusing always came along, an occasional showtroup, a pair of newlyweds arriving or departing. Often the young blades of the village took the train to Erie for an evening's frolic then, there being no late train home, spent the wee small hours in the Erie Depot knowing that the train crew would waken them and see that they were aboard the train in the morning getting home in time for their daily

duties. Now the grandchildren of these same joy-makers think nothing of the auto trip to Erie or Buffalo, taking in two or three shows and getting back home before they are hardly missed.

There have been births and deaths in this train, romances have begun which ended in happy marriages and the establishment of homes.

I also remember on one occasion a couple were trying to elope and were forcibly taken off the train at Ripley. Later in the day the parents escorted them to Justice Bennett and were as anxious to see them married as they were to apprehend them earlier in the day, much to the enjoyment of the train crew when they took the evening train back to Erie.

As motor cars and streamlined busses came more and more into use, the trains began to be taken off. The enormous new station on the outskirts of Buffalo was built in 1929 and the old Exchange St. depot in downtown Buffalo was abandoned. This was really the death of family shopping tours to Buffalo--first one train and then another was either taken off or stops at local stations discontinued except at connection lines. Now the old D. A. V. & P. is not much more than a memory as is also the J. W. from Westfield to Jamestown.

There has always been a certain fascination about Dunkirk for me, I think the fact that the train passed directly through on one of the main streets of the city and as children we were always waiting for it. I also remember on several occasions seeing entire emigrant families boarding the train at Buffalo, mothers with shawls over their heads, bright-eyed children in quaint old country clothes, and fathers carrying in bags and bundles all their earthly possessions, but in their hearts the sturdy determination and faith of all the new people in entering this land of promise of freedom and good livelihood. Many of these same

people are now grandparents of Dunkirk's leading Polish citizens and business men. All these strangers, these much frightened and bewildered people were kindly treated and made friends which they never forgot on this good old train.

Ripley and perhaps other towns were butter and egg markets. Not a day passed but one or more genial farmers brought two or three baskets of eggs and several five and ten pound jars of fresh country butter to my father who was Telegraph Operator and Ticket Agent for many years, these to be picked up by some one of the train crew on the accomodation for their families and neighbors. I really think they must have supplied half of Erie.

Well, things have advanced and we of three generations back often think of those days of transportation and our first thought is 'how we would like to be back riding on the old accomodation again.' But would we? When it was taken off, everyone wondered what would become of the local mail service. That has been efficiently taken care of by the Star Mail truck operating every day on perfect schedule.

We can drive to Buffalo in a little over an hour and the bus service takes us there in a little over two hours and to Erie in thirty minutes. And after flying from Detroit to Erie last August in 90 minutes flying time, would we, even us older people, really be satisfied and happy if we were to be put back to 30 years ago? How much farther will traveling advance in the next few years, I also wonder.

I close with a couple of verses from an old poem referring to the first mail train. These verses were given to my father when he was Telegraph Operator at the Ripley Depot one night many, many years ago.

Young man, I'm tired and weary, and I'll borrow your chair for  
awhile,

To sit by your office window where the golden sunbeams smile,  
For I've traveled some miles this morning, although I'm old and gray,  
To see Uncle Sam's pet hobby, the fast White Mail today.

Miles, with his hand on the lever, looked out as he passed the door,  
Looked out at the sunbeams stealing down to the Lake's green shore.  
Then he pulled the throttle wide open, and seemed with an air to say,  
'Uncle Sam, I have run like lightning with your Fast White Mail today.'

I wish to dedicate these pages to the memory of my father and  
mother, Mr. and Mrs. George Phetteplace.

*Emma Scheep.*

*Oct. 2, 1948.*

*Took place in Topsham,*

*1948*