



Three major NYC yards

Selkirk Yard near Albany, N.Y.

Cornerstone of New York Central's \$25 million "Castleton Cutoff" improvement project, Selkirk opened on November 20, 1924. Central's objective was to bypass congestion at Albany, where two Hudson River drawbridges and the "Water Level Route's" one big bump, the 1.75 percent West Albany grade between the Hudson and Mohawk valleys, impeded operations where the routes from Boston, New York City, and Buffalo met (West Albany required helper engines on each train). NYC used land on, and near, the right of way of its "West Shore" predecessor for a new 23-mile double-track line connecting the new 1-mile-long, 150-foot-high Alfred H. Smith Hudson River bridge (honoring NYC's president, 1919-1924) and the main line at Hoffman's, near Amsterdam. Selkirk Yard, 10 miles southwest of the capital city, stretched six miles along the line between South Bethlehem and Selkirk, and when built, had 120 miles of new track designed to handle 8,000 cars a day. Selkirk had two hump yards, but only the westbound one received the intended car retarders, in 1927. This photo, from a series made probably in that year, shows the west end of the complex; unseen just beyond the top of the photo at the east end are, among other features, two roundhouses. Selkirk was vastly rebuilt and changed under NYC President Alfred E. Perlman in the 1960's, and has remained a key facility for successive owners Penn Central, Conrail, and today, CSX Transportation.

- 1 Old New York, West Shore & Buffalo right of way
- 2 Eastbound receiving yard
- 3 Icing plant, for refrigerated cars in transit
- 4 Westbound advance yard (westbound receiving yard is out of photo to the west)
- 5 Eastbound hump (lacked retarders)
- 6 Eastbound classification yard
- 7 Jericho Turnpike road overpass
- 8 "Motor car track" (northernmost track, running entire length of yard to transport employees)
- 9 Westbound caboose storage tracks
- 10 Westbound classification yard
- 11 Eastbound advance yard
- 12 Repair shop and yard
- 13 General Yardmaster's office
- 14 Eastbound caboose storage tracks
- 15 Westbound hump (retarders added in 1927)

Photo: New York Central. Research: Jim Shaughnessy.

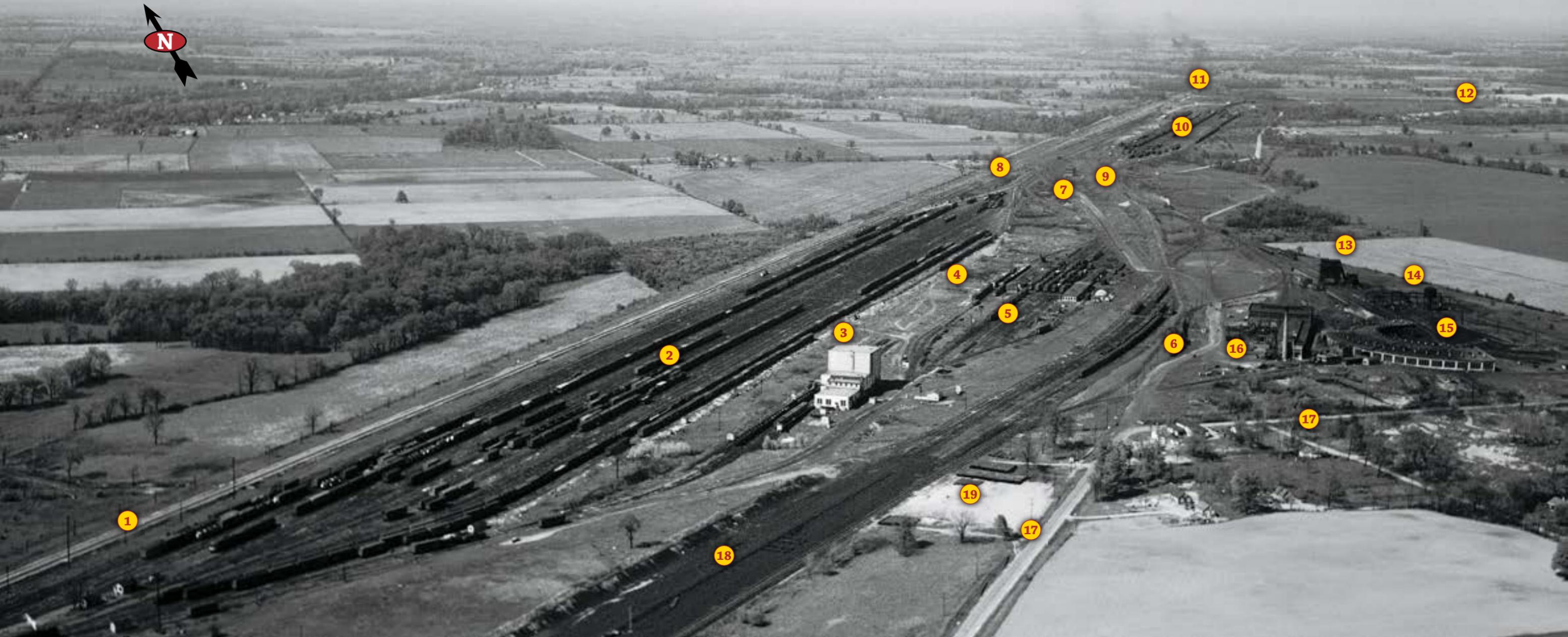


Frontier Yard in Buffalo, N.Y.

Straddling the border of the city of Buffalo and the town of Cheektowaga to the east, the new yard (named for its home region, the “Niagara Frontier”) was part of NYC President Al Perlman’s vast 1950’s improvement program for the system. Formally opened on March 14, 1957, it replaced the outmoded 1890’s Gardenville Yard, supposedly built on Vanderbilt property just to the south. Soon after Frontier was finished, it acquired the nickname “Disneyland,” among both railroaders and fans, because so much was squeezed into a relatively small area. Especially troublesome were tight curves on the nine tracks in Group 7 of the 63-track classification yard, on which special wheel-oilers had to be installed. Today as a CSX property, Frontier Yard remains much the same as a half century ago when the photo was taken, except that the volume of cars handled is much less, owing mostly to the disappearance of heavy industry from the area.

- 1 Mainline milepost 435 (from New York City)
- 2 Lackawanna Railroad Black Rock Branch viaduct
- 3 Hump retarders’ tower
- 4 Hump apex and employee building
- 5 Master retarder
- 6 South hump bypass track
- 7 North hump bypass track
- 8 Broadway (U.S. Route 20), town of Cheektowaga
- 9 New York-Chicago main (Track 2 left, Track 1 right)
- 10 Escape track
- 11 North receiving and departure yard, 8 tracks
- 12 South receiving and departure yard, 10 tracks (including former mainline Tracks 3 and 4)
- 13 Classification yard (63 tracks: seven groups of 9)
- 14 Gravel access road (a.k.a. “Page’s Highway”)
- 15 Old New York, West Shore & Buffalo yard
- 16 Tracks for scrapping damaged or obsolete cars
- 17 Outdoor RIP tracks (repair-in-place yard)
- 18 Car-repair shop
- 19 Diesel house, shop, and servicing facilities (still under construction at time of photo)
- 20 Fairbanks-Morse diesel switchers
- 21 1st, 2nd, and 3rd loop tracks
- 22 Railroad YMCA, West End Yardmaster’s office, train-crew register room, crew facilities
- 23 Former Wagner car shops/Pullman car shops

Photo: New York Central, early 1957. Research: Fred Furringer, Charlea A. Eiler, and John P. “Jack” Lynch.



MC yard at Niles, Mich.

In the years before World War I, the Michigan Central decided to shorten its Middle Division crew district west of Jackson, Mich., to accommodate the 16-hour crew law. MC closed its westernmost terminal at Michigan City, Ind., and moved it to the northeast edge of Niles in the southwest corner Michigan, 90 miles west of Jackson. One of the few freight yards built under the U.S. Railroad Administration, it involved purchasing 1,100 acres of farmland, exca-

vating 2 million cubic yards of earth, and laying 75 miles of track. It had a narrow, 4-mile-long configuration, matching east- and westbound classification yards, two gravity "rider" humps with a large office building between them, and a third, 6-track classification yard linked to the "cutoff" to MC's Air Line Division, a separate line to Jackson. Locomotive facilities consisted of a 30-stall roundhouse, a six-track shop, a large coaling dock, and a two-story YMCA hotel. Since NYC (which leased MC in 1930) routed most perishables on

MC instead of via Toledo, the Niles yard had a huge icehouse. Alas, the yard was built just before automatic retarders came in, so it soon was largely obsolete. An obvious target for NYC's massive late-1950's consolidations, it was closed in 1956 in favor of a new yard in nearby Elkhart, Ind., on the Toledo line. Most of the property visible in this circa-1950 photo remains in place, undeveloped and overgrown. Still standing today: the roundhouse, shop, icehouse, hotel (just out of photo), and the concrete bridges at the summits of both humps.

- 1 Double-track Detroit-Chicago main line (1 mile to Niles depot, still used by Amtrak)
- 2 Westbound classification yard
- 3 Icehouse (still standing in 2006)
- 4 Transfer platform
- 5 Car-repair yard
- 6 Stores department
- 7 Yard offices building
- 8 Westbound hump crest
- 9 Eastbound hump crest
- 10 Eastbound classification yard
- 11 Main line to Kalamazoo (48 miles)
- 12 Thompson Road viaduct (extant in 2006) over middle of abandoned departure yard on former Air Line cutoff to Jackson, Mich.
- 13 Coaling tower
- 14 Water tower
- 15 30-stall roundhouse, with turntable (both extant in 2006; hotel is just east of roundhouse on Terminal Road)
- 16 6-track locomotive shop (later used for diesels; still standing in 2006) and power house
- 17 Terminal Road (built by MCRP in 1919)
- 18 Eastbound receiving yard (being removed at time of photo)
- 19 Piles of crossties from dismantled receiving yard

Photo: Kevin P. Keefe collection. Research: Kevin P. Keefe.