In 1965 I was working as a writer and audio-visual specialist for Rotary International in Evanston, Ill. The service club held its district governors seminars at the Lake Placid Club in upstate New York in May, and I rode New York Central’s New England States from Chicago to Albany to attend one of the conferences. From Albany, I rode a bus north into the Adirondacks, but coming out afterward, it was a different story—the delegates had their own, all-sleeping-car NYC special train out of Lake Placid.

I had a roomette in a Southern Pacific 10-roomette, 6-double bedroom car off the Sunset Limited. The special connected at Utica with eastbound and westbound NYC mainline trains. I was headed east, and upon arrival at New York’s Grand Central Terminal in the morning, I met up with an old Army buddy and rail hobbyist, Les Dean, who had arranged an itinerary to see as much railroading as possible on the long Memorial Day weekend.

Les met me on arrival. Forsaking New York City, we took the subway to Hoboken, N.J., and spent the first day riding “something exotic,” the former Delaware, Lackawanna & Western local (this was five years after the Erie Lackawanna merger) from Hoboken Terminal out to Branchville, N.J., and back. I stayed overnight in a hotel; Les went home.

The next day, Sunday, May 30, we transferred to New York’s Penn Station, where we caught Pennsylvania Railroad train 121, the Mid-Day Congressional, to 30th Street Station, Philadelphia. From nearby Reading Terminal, we then took Reading Company train 7, the Pottstown Express, out as far as Norristown, riding the front platform of the lead Budd RDC. At Norristown, we caught a Brill “Bullet” on the Philadelphia Suburban Transportation Co.’s high-speed, third-rail line to 69th Street Terminal in Upper Darby.

At 69th Street, we connected with Philadelphia Transportation Co.’s Market-Frankford subway-elevated line, which took us back to center-city Philadelphia. From the Pennsy’s Suburban Station (named for the destinations of its trains, not its downtown location), we then rode a Budd Silverliner M.U. commuter train out to Chestnut Hill, end of the line but still within the city of Philadelphia.

On our return trip, we rode only as far as North Philadelphia, where the Chestnut Hill branch joined the New...
The first train I saw during my couple of hours at North Philadelphia on Sunday, May 30, 1965, was a baseball special bringing fans in for a Phillies game at nearby Connie Mack Stadium. The special unloaded at the normally eastbound platform (left) and was carrying at least one head-end car, typical of PRR’s “move it now” practice. Toward the end of my visit, both the General, bound for Chicago, and the East Coast Champion, for Miami (above, left and right, respectively) and running a bit late, were at the west-bound platform together. (North Philly had two double-facing platforms, one for each direction.) The “Champ” will exchange its GG1 for diesels at Washington Union Station for the trip on the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac to Richmond, Va., where it will gain the rails of its sponsor, Atlantic Coast Line.
York-Philadelphia main line. We spent the last couple of hours there, before I had to head for home, watching the parade of Pennsy trains pass on the eight tracks through the station.

Not since the years I spent as a youth on the platforms of Englewood Union Station in Chicago, watching New York Central Hudsons and Niagaras battle it out with doubleheaded Pennsylvania K4s Pacifics, had a station been so exciting for me. Pennsy’s magnificent GG1 electrics, when they dug in and got their trains rolling again, were almost as thrilling to watch as steam had been at Englewood.

“North Philly” had trains to and from just about anywhere on the vast PRR.

Freight action during my Sunday visit was limited to a pair of locals. After the baseball special’s appearance, a Baldwin switcher (above) trundled west with five coil-steel gondolas. That’s the Chestnut Hill branch’s separate North Philly station to the left. Soon an Alco RS11 (left) rolled through on a westbound platform track with a local.
The sun popped out for the arrival of the Silver Meteor, bound for Miami via Richmond and the Seaboard Air Line, behind one of PRR's handful of latter-day Tuscan red GG1's, the 4907 (above). While the Meteor made its station stop, a train of Silverliner electric M.U.'s diverged onto the Chestnut Hill branch (right); Connie Mack Stadium is visible in the background. After the suburban train cleared, the Meteor left on time at 5:20 p.m. (below); its next stop: 30th Street Station, PRR's primary intercity terminal.

The railroad kept this important corridor fluid—PRR was known to attach mail cars to the rear of a chartered special train run by someone else just to keep the traffic moving. At North Philadelphia, one didn’t have long to wait to see a train with every sort of equipment: head-end cars, coaches, lounges, diners, sleepers, and observation cars would breeze up to the high-level platforms, make a brief stop, and upon a wave of a conductor’s arm or two quick tugs on a communication cord, would quickly get rolling again.

This visit was on the middle day of the three-day Memorial Day 1965 weekend—railroading, after all, went on round the clock no matter what the calendar said, especially if there was a mail contract to fulfill. At the end of the day, as I recall, I was the only passenger to board the pride of the Pennsy, train 29, the Broadway Limited. It appeared to be devoid of passengers; businessmen who patronized the Broadway didn’t do
so on a long holiday weekend.

That evening in observation-lounge-sleeper Mountain View, only one other passenger and I were on hand to enjoy our martinis. When I went to the dining car, the wide door opened to reveal a vast emptiness... with, of course, a steward and four waiters, resplendent in white uniforms, at their duty stations as always. As I entered, the waiters came to attention with military precision, and one swung a chair out from under the table: “Here, sir?”

The prime rib was superb. I noticed the change from electric to diesel power at Harrisburg, and I thought the E units had to work much harder than the GG1 did to get a wheel on No. 29. The smooth acceleration just wasn’t there anymore; with the diesels, it seemed labored.

On an empty train at night, there isn’t much to do. I was fast asleep in my roomette by Altoona. I think it was near Valparaiso, Ind., that I awoke the next morning. I quickly dressed and went for breakfast. At Hobart, the train went into emergency and used up its cushion of time waiting for a signal to change. Somebody had stabbed the Broadway! Nevertheless, we arrived at Chicago Union Station on time.

I was fortunate to ride several all-Pullman trains: the Night Ferry from London to Paris; Illinois Central’s Panama Limited between Chicago and New Orleans; Union Pacific’s City of Los Angeles; Southern Pacific’s Lark from Los Angeles to San Francisco, and Santa Fe’s Super Chief. It’s the Broadway Limited, though, that stands out.
As a “Clocker” for New York made its station stop (at right in photo above—note the Pullman sleepers in parlor-car use on the rear), the Florida-bound West Coast Champion showed up to share the westbound platform with a Clocker for 30th Street (at left in middle photo). Minutes later, the Clocker’s GG1 (No. 4910, at right, below) accelerated past the 4894 on the Champ, heading for Zoo, where most Chicago and St. Louis trains diverged west, skipping 30th Street (hence North Philly’s importance).
My first Berkshire
It all began one October weekend in 1956. I was with my parents, driving along the shore of Lake Erie south of Buffalo, when over the course of 30 or 45 minutes I saw several smoke trails in the distance. I knew the New York Central main line was over there just out of sight, along with another railroad—what was it called?—oh yeah, the Nickel Plate. I was certain the NYC had no steam left in Buffalo; the Central had dieselized here in 1954. But what about this other outfit? Was there still a hometown railroad operating steam?

The following week I did some research. After calling the number listed in the phone book for the Nickel Plate and explaining what I wanted, I was transferred to the roundhouse. The man on the phone told me that all freight trains in and out of Buffalo were regularly assigned steam—mostly 2-8-4 Berkshires, with the occasional 2-8-2 Mikado. Diesels handled the passenger trains and the yard work. However, he mentioned as an afterthought, there were still four 0-8-0 yard engines active.

He went on to tell me that the railroad operated out of two yards located in the south end of the city: Abbott Road Yard and Tifft Yard. The roundhouse was close to Abbott Road Yard. Checking a city map, I determined that a key highway bridge crossed each yard. Furthermore, there was a bus route over each bridge. Perfect! This was critical information, since I wasn’t yet old enough to drive and I had only the bus to get around town.

After plotting the trip—via three buses since my family lived in the northeast suburbs—I made plans to check things out. A railfan friend agreed to accompany me and, on a sunny October Saturday morning, we set out in high spirits. Our bus dropped us off on the South Park Avenue bridge, which crossed Abbott Road Yard. During the course of our several hours on the bridge, we confirmed that the Nickel Plate was indeed operating steam. We saw one 0-8-0 come under the bridge, and we could see smoke and steam rising in the distance from other engines at the roundhouse. Unfortunately, we saw many more diesels. NKP’s Alco switchers were in constant motion working the yard, and over on parallel lines there was a steady stream of NYC, Erie, and Lackawanna freights—all powered by diesels.

Several weekends later, my friend and I took the bus to Buffalo’s other big Nickel Plate facility, Tifft Yard. The long Tifft Street viaduct crossed the southern edge of the NKP yard, as well as tracks of the New York Central, Pennsylvania, Baltimore & Ohio, Lehigh Valley, and Erie. The bridge was a wonderful train-watching spot with an incredible variety and frequency of trains. This time, we were rewarded by an NKP freight in each direction, both powered by Berkshires. I was becoming hooked on the Nickel Plate and intended to return soon.

Alas, by the time another opportunity presented itself, winter had arrived. Train-watching atop a bridge exposed to the elements during a Buffalo winter...
is not something a sane person does—not even a teenage railfan. Further exploration would have to wait.

The following March, I again began thinking about the Nickel Plate. I really wanted to get to the roundhouse, but as a teenager I was reluctant to just stroll in and say "hello." I recalled that the individual on the phone with whom I had spoken last fall had been very helpful and friendly. Maybe I should just call again and ask if I could visit the engine terminal? I proceeded with this plan, and the person I spoke to said there would be no problem—just bring an adult.

The next weekend, I convinced my dad to be the adult. My father wasn’t a railfan—he was a golfer—but from time to time he indulged me, and as a favor he drove my friend and me to the Abbott Road roundhouse. We walked into the foreman’s office and introduced ourselves, explaining what we’d like to do. The man behind the desk, who was not the person I had spoken with, welcomed us nevertheless and suggested that we start our visit with a roundhouse tour. His name was Robbie, and he led us into the interior of the roundhouse.

Robbie started by inviting us up into the cab of a Berkshire. He opened the turbogenerator’s steam valve so we’d have some light in the cab, and he gave us a short description of the backhead, pointing out the throttle, screw reverse, brake levers, whistle lever, stoker valves, blower, etc. He finished by opening the firebox doors for a look at the fire.

We were continuing around the roundhouse when I spotted engine 175, a 4-6-4. The Nickel Plate owned eight Hudsons, but at that time I didn’t know it had any. She was cold, and Robbie explained that she was used as passenger protection power and for work trains. The following year I would ride behind her on a Buffalo-Cleveland round-trip excursion sponsored by the Buffalo Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society.

We walked outside just as a Berkshire was moving onto the turntable to enter the roundhouse. Robbie explained that Buffalo had only a 90-foot turntable and with a Berkshire’s wheelbase of almost 88 feet, there was less than a foot to spare at each end of the table. I later learned that Buffalo was the one Nickel Plate mainline terminal that had not been modernized after World War II [see “Berkshire Launching Pad,” Steam Glory 2004]. The roundhouse was the original, dating from the 1880’s. Its stalls were extended twice in later
Carlson's first visit to the Nickel Plate's Abbott Road roundhouse ended with the departure of No. 779, the final NKP Berkshire to be built, hauling a westbound freight.

After that experience, I was a confirmed Nickel Plate fan and anxious for another visit. So, on a Saturday two weeks later, I called Robbie to see if I could come by on Sunday. I explained that I would be by myself as my dad had plans and my friend was unavailable too. "Would that be a problem?" I asked. "Not at all," he said. The next afternoon, after my three-bus journey, I walked into Robbie's office. We were shortly joined by one of his people—a hostler named Brian. Robbie introduced me and asked me to accompany Brian for the afternoon.

Brian told me the first job was to move an 0-8-0 into the roundhouse for servicing. Engine 303 was simmering on a ready track that did not connect to the turntable, and two Alco S2 switchers were blocking it in. We first had to move the Alcos to an adjoining track. Brian moved the first one. I had asked Brian a ton of questions about the diesel, and I think he realized I knew something about locomotives. Indeed, I was the proud owner of Alco's Manual for Enginemen, which covered operation of the S2's.

As Brian was about to move the second engine, he stood up and invited me to take the engineer's seat. "Would you like to back it out?" Would I! But, I said, I didn't want to get him in trouble. He countered by saying that Robbie had told him to take good care of me. Brian released the hand brake and, under his watchful eye, I opened the bell valve, moved the controller handle to the first reverse position, kicked off the air, and advanced the throttle one notch until we began to move, and then I pulled it back one more notch. The old Alcos had 16-notch, air-operated throttles. We backed up and then pulled forward onto the adjacent track, where I stopped next to the 303.

In the 303's cab, Brian took a peek at the fire and the water level and decided he needed to touch things up a bit before she went into the roundhouse. He started an injector, and then cracked the blower valve while he put on several scoops of coal to cover up some thin spots in the fire. The fire had previously been cleaned.

After about five minutes he pronounced her ready and we walked over to the ground to remove the chains from around the drivers. When he got back in the cab, he said, "Let's go," and pointed toward the engineer's seat. By now I
had to pinch myself to make sure this was real. I had just operated my first diesel, and now I was going to run a steam engine!

I backed the 303 onto the turntable lead, and under Brian's direction pulled her forward up to the edge of the turntable pit, where a stop was mandatory. The turntable operator saw me in the cab and didn't quite know what to make of the situation. But then he saw Brian behind me and broke out in a big grin as he gave me a highball to move the engine onto the table. Brian told me to move it out onto the turntable until the bridge was next to the cab window. I did this, set the air, and moved the reverse bar to top dead center. Brian took over at this point.

After we had been rotated to the roundhouse service stall, Brian blew two long and loud whistle blasts and, with the bell clanging, he moved the 0-8-0 inside and stopped with the stack under the smoke hood. Brian set chains around the drivers and shut off the air pump and turbogenerator. I asked why he shut off the air pump and he replied, "Nothing worse than a bunch of air pumps banging away in an otherwise quiet enginehouse." Job complete.

Next on the list was engine 700, the first of the magnificent Nickel Plate Berkshires. The 1934 Alco had come in on an eastbound some hours earlier, had just been lubed, and now needed to be moved outside to a ready track. I followed Brian up into the cab and watched as he turned on the turbogenerator and started the air pumps. There was still enough air to move the engine, and Brian pronounced us ready to go. I got off, pulled the chains from around the drivers, and climbed back on.

The turntable operator had opened the stall doors, and he gave Brian a hand signal to back up. Brian made several turns on the screw reverse wheel to put the engine in reverse, kicked off the air, and turned on the bell. After three short, soft whistle blasts, Brian gently opened the throttle, and as soon as he felt movement he closed it. He did this several times until we were creeping out of the roundhouse and onto the turntable, and then several more times to keep us moving. He had his eyes glued to the turntable operator, who was guiding him so he could fit the Berkshire on the short turntable.

On the operator's signal, Brian stopped the engine. He set the reverse gear to top center, the turntable operator unlocked the table, and we started to move. After we had been aligned with one of the turntable leads, Brian motioned to me. It was my turn! Following Brian's lead, after three short whistle blasts, I turned on the bell, put the engine in reverse, and backed us off the turntable—alternately opening and then quickly closing the throttle. I backed us to the sand house.

Brian filled the sand dome, and then we backed her a bit further to the water column for a drink. Brian said that we wouldn't top-off the coal bunker, however. The coal in Buffalo was mostly for NKP's 0-8-0's and the Hudson. There was a mainline coal dock about 50 miles west of Buffalo, which essentially served to coal Buffalo road engines. The Buffalo terminal was very cramped, and there was really no room for a modern coaling facility. Consequently, most trains took coal at the mainline dock both coming to, and departing from, Buffalo.

Brian touched up the fire, and we left the 700 for the outbound crew. She was scheduled for the "clean-up" run, which ran extra Sunday afternoons for
Conneaut, Ohio, with everything in the yard that hadn’t yet departed west. Abbott Road Yard had a capacity of only 500 cars, and the Nickel Plate was constantly keeping the terminal fluid by moving cars to Conneaut—which really handled much of the westbound classification for Buffalo.

Our next victims were a pair of Bluebird PAs, which needed to be moved from the fuel track. After doing this, it was time for me to head for home. It was getting late, and I still had a 90-minute bus trip ahead of me. I thanked Brian and Robbie and headed for the bus stop.

It had been quite a day. I was elated. I had gotten my first chance at the controls of a diesel, an 0-8-0, and my first Berkshire! But my elation was short-lived. When I got home, my mother was livid when she saw the condition of my jacket and slacks.

Over the course of the spring and summer, I made more visits to the roundhouse, and the men there always took good care of me. I got to hostle more engines around the terminal. I spent some afternoons riding the Alco switchers as they worked. I had several 0-8-0 rides. One time, on a transfer run to the Lackawanna, I had the opportunity to fire the engine on the way out and to do some running on the way back—when we were running light. It was a memorable summer. But like all good things, it had to end.

Brian was promoted in June, which ended my hostling experiences. Then one Saturday in late August, I called the roundhouse, asked for Robbie, and was told he no longer worked weekends—catch him on Monday. I called him, but it was immediately evident that the good days were over. There were just too many people around the terminal during the week. In any case, school would soon be starting, so I wouldn’t be available on weekdays anyway. So I thanked Robbie for all the wonderful experiences I’d had, and then I reverted to being just an observer of the NKP in Buffalo.

Nickel Plate steam in Buffalo lasted into June 1958. After it was gone, my attention shifted to Ontario where the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific still had roundhouses chock-full of steam. But I’ll never forget my Nickel Plate summer and the kindnesses of NKP railroaders.

Carlson also became acquainted with NKP’s Alco PA1 passenger diesels at Abbott Road. The road had 11, nicknamed Bluebirds for the color used on their noses and roofs.

The highlight of Carlson’s second visit to Abbott Road was a turn at the throttle of Berkshire 700, first of 80 built for the NKP; although most came from Lima, the initial 15 were Alcos.
Ten-Wheelers you could count on

Missouri Pacific’s former International & Great Northern class G’s were long-lived, powerful, comfortable, and dependable

By Hugo Lackman

In these days of “one-size-fits-all” American railroad motive power, I often think back to when locomotives had personalities, when a person who was even just casually interested in the subject could identify, by simply looking at a photo, what road owned the engine pictured.

A good example of motive power individuality would be the G-class Ten-Wheelers of the old International & Great Northern. I was familiar with this class, which had a long and varied life extending into the last days of steam on the railroad on which I spent most of my long engine-service career.

For those unfamiliar with Texas railroads, the I&GN was one of the state’s pioneer lines. It was chartered in 1873 to consolidate the Houston & Great Northern, which linked Houston with Palestine, Texas, to the north, and the International Railroad, which ran from Longview, in northern east Texas on the Texas & Pacific, south through Palestine to Hearne. The intent was that the I&GN would continue to Laredo as part of a route to Mexico City.

After a lease to the Katy, which then was in Jay Gould’s empire, the I&GN regained independence, only to enter receivership . . . twice, in 1908 and again in 1914. It emerged, with a hyphen replacing the ampersand, as the International-Great Northern in 1922, and was purchased by the Gulf Coast Lines two years later. The GCL was a collection of roads between New Orleans and Brownsville, Texas, whose principal component and parent was the New Orleans, Texas & Mexico. The NOT&M purchased the I-GN in 1924, the same year both went into the Missouri Pacific family.

Besides its Longview-San Antonio-Laredo and Palestine-Houston routes, the I-GN later added a line from Fort George Sisk, Louis A. Marre collection

The engineer of rebuilt class G No. 381 reads his orders before departing Laredo on September 2, 1949. A short ride on this engine inspired author Lackman to go railroading.

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Worth south to Spring, Texas, north of Houston, and several branches. The main locomotive shop for the I&GN was in Palestine (Pal-uh-steen), the system’s hub where three main routes converged. All these lines have been under the Union Pacific shield since the UP-MP merger of 1982.

Prior to 1903, I&GN motive power consisted mainly of small engines, 4-4-0’s and 4-6-0’s that were used in both passenger and freight service. At this time on many roads, the Ten-Wheeler was beginning to be supplanted by the Pacific because steel passenger cars were coming into use and freight trains were getting longer, necessitating more power. The 4-6-0 was already considered an obsolete type on the Santa Fe Railway, and within a few years 4-6-2’s and 2-8-2’s were appearing all over the country.

The I&GN, though, stayed with the Ten-Wheeler, and in 1903 ordered the first batch of what became the sizeable G class from the Rogers Works of Paterson, N.J., with the series beginning at No. 201. This very first class G was lettered for the Calvert, Waco & Brazos Valley, which I&GN was building at the time from Fort Worth to Spring.

The class G’s dimensions were typical of the era. They had 63-inch driving wheels and 20x28-inch cylinders; some carried a boiler pressure of 200 psi, while others carried 190.

After the initial group from Rogers, the next batch came from Cooke Works, also of Paterson. Much early I&GN locomotive history is obscured, some of it because the road had the annoying habit of removing builder’s plates, at random, from its engines. Baldwin built a third group of G’s, and a final order came in 1908 from Brooks Works at Dunkirk, N.Y., bringing the total class G fleet to 51 engines (Rogers, Cooke, and Brooks all were components of the American Locomotive Co.)

Texas law required railroads in the state to be headquartered there; thanks to this local management, subsidiaries of the big systems serving the state retained some of their own identities. Missouri Pacific’s principal Texas subsidiaries were the I-GN, Gulf Coast Lines, and Texas & Pacific. Each one had its own pay system, and I recall during one two-week period in 1942, I got separate paychecks from the I-GN, the Houston & Brazos Valley, the Sugarland Railway, and the Houston Belt & Terminal.

When MoPac acquired the Gulf Coast Lines and I-GN, it instituted a general renumbering of locomotives.

At Mission, just above the Mexican border 55 miles west of Brownsville, class G No. 337 simmers in the 100-degree heat on an August 1948 afternoon beside No. 362, an ex-NOT&M engine. The 337 was the Mission switcher, while 362 worked a local freight job to San Benito.
owned by the subsidiaries, and I-GN’s class G’s had 109 added to their road numbers, making them Nos. 310-360.

At a date lost to history, but before the MoPac entered the picture, someone in the I&GN’s motive power department decided that several of the G’s would be rebuilt into slightly larger passenger engines, and 14 were given a complete rebuild in Palestine shops. All in the class already had been retrofitted with piston valves and superheaters, but they kept their Stephenson valve gear. The “new” engines had Walschaerts valve gear and were given new 67-inch drivers and 21x28-inch cylinders; boiler pressure remained at 200 psi. Under the MoPac, they carried numbers 371-384.

Several years after the first 14 were rebuilt, it was decided to do 3 more, and the 320, 333, and 339 were selected. They kept those numbers after the rebuild and were excellent engines. New 21x28-inch cylinders and 67-inch drivers again were fitted, but the boiler pressure was raised to 210 psi. Although this concluded the major rebuild program, over several years at least seven more G’s were given a limited rebuild: 322, 342, 343, 347, 348, 350, and 351. They kept their 20x28-inch cylinders but got Walschaerts valve gear, and all but one (322) had 67-inch tires shrunk over their original 63-inch drivers. The 200-psi boiler pressure was retained. These were considered dual-service engines and could be found on just about any type of train: branchline and mainline locals, through freights, even passenger runs, especially second sections.

Shortly after the MoPac era began, Pacifics took over some of the heaviest I-GN passenger turns. But in the late 1930’s two of the rebuilt Ten-Wheelers were still hauling the Sunshine Special on the Trinity Subdivision between Palestine and Galveston. The 378 and 381 were regulars on this run, whose normal consist was a dozen heavy-weight cars.

All of the unrebuilt G’s retained their 20x28 cylinders with piston valves and superheaters. Their main employment was on branch locals and traveling switchers. MoPac classified the unrebuilt G’s as TN-63; the rebuilt ones with 67-inch drivers were TN-67’s.

The old class G’s launched me on my Missouri Pacific engine-service career. The very first locomotive I ever rode was the 381, one of the 14 passenger rebuilds, back in 1934. I was living in Galveston then and had become well acquainted with Purdy Williams, the roundhouse foreman there. Purdy and Division Superintendent “Uncle Gus” Ebert decided it was time for me to experience a cab ride.

So on one cold December night, I was instructed to be at Union Station when the Sunshine Special arrived. They would give me a ride in the cab out to the wye to turn the train in order to have it ready for departure the next morning, a trip of 6 or 7 miles.

I climbed into the cab and got on the fireman’s seatbox. When Purdy eased the throttle open, I felt for the first time the gritting of the drivers on the sanded rail, listened to the barks from the stack, and heard the wail of
the whistle at close range. I was then completely “hooked” and determined that some day I would occupy the righthand seatbox as an engineer. My first job firing for pay was on the 338, working in the Freeport-Velasco section of the Gulf Coast about 40 miles west of Galveston. When World War II began, Dow Chemical Co. started a massive building program in this area. The company had a large chemical plant there, and a plant that utilized a saltwater process for the production of magnesium. MoPac assigned unrebuilt G’s to this district, where they did some truly incredible work. In addition to the Dow traffic, the Freeport Sulphur Co. was going full blast at the time, and heavy sulphur trains went north to Angleton where they were turned over to the Kingsville Division mainline trains.

On many steamy, humid nights I fired one of the old G’s over the Hoskins branch with boxcars of crushed sulphur. We would back against 75 heavy loads and wait for the two single-stage air pumps to charge the brake pipe. After we had enough air, the engineer would back up to get as much slack as possible, then throw her over into the front corner and widen the throttle. It would often take four or five tries before we got everything going in the same direction. The little engine would work up to 15 mph or so over the 17-mile run to Hoskins Junction yard. It was a tribute to the durability of steam power that the old Ten-Wheelers performed so well while being manned by student firemen as well as engineers just set up from the firemen’s board. All this was accomplished with bad water and little maintenance. Somehow the engines survived and stayed on those jobs until replaced by diesel switchers in the mid-1950’s.

Another of the partial rebuilds figured in my career when the engineer put me on the right side of the 347 one afternoon in Oakwood, Texas, and I ran the engine the 18 miles to Palestine. Getting back to the class G’s themselves, I can only say that whoever designed them truly knew his craft. As with all steam classes, some engines were better than others; the worst one I can recall was the 327, a hard steamer that just wouldn’t dig in and pull like her sisters. As a group, the only drawback for engine crews was the fact that the boiler extended back into the cab, giving them a short deck which made them hot to work on in summer. Even though they had no trailing truck, their riding qualities were very good, regardless of speed. They were very steady, and performed well on curves. I recall firing some of the rebuilt G’s making 70 mph on troop trains.

Even late in their careers, the class G’s were long-lived, powerful for their size, mostly comfortable for the crews, and easy to maintain. They were Ten-Wheelers you could count on.

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**After my first-ever cab ride, on the 381, I was “hooked.” I determined that someday I would become an engineer.**

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Ten-Wheeler 359, still on 63-inch drivers, ambles down a street Houston on April 18, 1951. Note backup headlight atop doghouse on tender.
The last 11 years of the Lackawanna

From the 1949 streamliner *Phoebe Snow* to the 1960 merger with Erie, I watched my employer, “The Road of Anthracite,” undergo significant changes. For a time, we thought another merger—with the Nickel Plate—would be our salvation.

By John R. Canfield

The year 1949 proved to be a paradox for the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western, the 925-mile railroad linking the New York City area with Buffalo and other upstate New York points. This long-time blue-chip property among eastern anthracite carriers in 1948 had posted its highest net income per share since 1930, at $3.70—only to have gross revenues for 1949 drop 12 percent, producing a net of only $1.32 per share.

This disappointment, an early warning of vulnerability, was due in part to a mild recession and prolonged labor stoppages in the coal and steel industries. However, of primary concern to DL&W President William White was “the diversion of traffic to subsidized forms of competition” (highways) and the establishment of the 40-hour workweek for non-operating railroad employees on September 1. The annualized cost of this change was estimated to be $2.5 million.

On the plus side, Lackawanna was handling two-thirds of its gross ton-miles with diesel power. Further, this figure was destined to climb to near 85 percent by year’s end, thanks to the delivery of six 3,000 h.p. EMD F7 duos and one 4,500 h.p. F7 trio for road freight work, as well as 10 Alco switchers. (As was common in the era, DL&W viewed multiple-unit cabbody road diesels as single locomotives.)

The Lackawanna’s primary event, however, occurred November 15, 1949, when it inaugurated the *Phoebe Snow* streamliner on a daylight schedule between DL&W’s Hoboken (N.J.) Terminal and Buffalo. This maroon, gray, and
gold beauty, named for the fictional advertising heroine of an earlier era on "The Road of Anthracite," was upon its debut the finest new passenger train to appear on any Class 1 trunk line of comparable size.

That year also marked a tentative start to my railroad career when I hired out as a summer laborer in the Lackawanna section gang based at Paterson, N.J., on the low-grade freight route known as the Boonton Branch. In those days, the only piece of mechanized track equipment used by our gang was a gasoline-powered rail saw. Everything else—even drilling bolt holes through the web of 131-lb. rail—was accomplished solely with human muscle and sweat.

The leveling of track surface, or "spot tamping," was a simple but frustrating activity. We used a track jack to lift one rail at the low spot. One gang member inserted a lining bar under the end of the tie to lift the tie against the plate, while his partner pounded rock ballast under the tie using a short-handle pick-axe. On the plus side, the gang got a respite each time a train approached (in those days, we worked "under traffic").

There were several daily Pacific-powered passenger locals, as well as the occasional daytime through freight moving behind either "covered wagon" diesels or the big Poconos, as DL&W called its 4-8-4's. Sometimes they'd be in tandem for the westbound 48-feet-to-the-mile climb to the New Jersey watershed at Port Morris, for which a combi-
nation of F3 and 4-8-4 was rated at 4,790 tons. After a couple of months of this unaccustomed toil, at the princely rate of $1.06 per hour ($1.59 on Saturdays), I was more than happy to return for my high school senior year!

Thanks primarily to the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, the Lackawanna’s net income in 1950 rose to $3.8 million, or $2.28 per share. Faced with more than $19 million of Construction Bonds due to mature soon, DL&W management embarked on a complicated refinancing effort but still was able to increase its holdings in the stock of the Nickel Plate Road, its key western connection, to 66,000 shares.

Only four locomotives (Also RS3’s) were delivered in 1950, but DL&W had on order 29 more units, all road-switchers. Owing to considering multiple-unit road engines as “single locomotives” (each of which shared a common road number, with letter suffixes), DL&W’s 31 F-unit “engines” actually totaled 75 units: 45 cab (“A”) units and 30 booster (“B”) units. Stated another way, Lackawanna owned five A-B-A, 86-mph, steam-generator-equipped passenger engines; seven A-B-A and six A-B freighters geared for 65 mph; and one A-B-A and 12 A-B “drag engines” geared for 45 or 48 mph [see roster, opposite page]. There was one exception to the A-B nature of the two-unit freighters—F7 631A and C, which was two cab units!

This practice of buying locomotives a few at a time for specific assignments—in DL&W’s case, chiefly low-speed engines east of Scranton, with faster ones to the west—was common to many railroads just converting to diesels, but would have future repercussions.

Quiet 100th, change at the top

The Lackawanna celebrated its centennial on October 15, 1951, quietly, with the festivities limited to the dedication of a plaque at the Scranton passenger station commemorating the start-up of ancient predecessor Liggetts Gap Railroad. Of greater importance, from a non-historical standpoint, was the delivery that year of its 11 2,250 h.p. EMD E8’s, the “Cadillac” of passenger diesels. This acquisition released the five original 4,500 h.p. F3 passenger trios, after re-gearing for a maximum of 65 mph, to fast freight service. The latter did retain their steam generators, though, and would be pressed into commuter service later in their careers.

A significant management change occurred in summer 1952. William White, Lackawanna’s wartime leader and architect of its financial restructuring, accepted the presidency of the New York Central. He was succeeded by Perry M. Shoemaker, who’d been serving as vice president-operations. Shoemaker was destined, by events beyond his control, to guide the Lackawanna toward seeking ultimate salvation through merger.

The summer of 1952 also marked my return to Lackawanna’s ranks, this time in the operating department. Although still a full-time university student, I hired out as an extra towerman on the Morris & Essex Division, ultimately becoming qualified at 14 of the division’s 17 staffed interlockings. The control machines varied from state-of-the-art CTC units to several “armstrong” interlocking plants where manual levers were used to move several hundred feet of pipe that ultimately positioned and locked the switch points.

Entering the towermen’s ranks was hardly a shrewd career move, since the railroad was actively pursuing the consolidation of three towers to be controlled from a new location at Newark, as well as the substitution of dispatcher-controlled CTC for three towers on the Boonton Branch. It did, however, provide me a temporary if uneven income, free transportation to and from school in New York, and a unique perspective of an interesting rail operation very much in a state of flux.

On the occasion of my 21st birthday, June 5, 1953, I was called to cover a vacancy as second-trick leverman at Grove Street Tower, one mile west of Hoboken Terminal. I cleared the five westbound signals on track 3 for the passage of the last scheduled steam-powered passenger train from Hoboken. The train was the 6 o’clock “semi-express” to Dover, No. 1067, pulled by 79-inch-driven Pacific 1121 under the command of engineer Russell "Butch" Lawrence. (The last recorded use of steam power anywhere on the system occurred in Scranton yard on July 13.)

Overall during 1953, Lackawanna
enjoyed its highest net income per share ($3.94) since 1929 on gross revenue of almost $90 million. Of concern was the continuing erosion of the onetime staple anthracite traffic, which was forcing DL&W to pursue additional interline merchandise business even as two-thirds of that year’s revenue was already coming from it. This was why DL&W owned slightly over 15 percent of the Nickel Plate’s stock and was attempting to elect two directors to its board.

The position of towerman wasn’t entirely devoid of opportunities to critically observe management’s foibles. After graduation in June 1954, I applied for a day-shift “temporary hold down” at Millburn Tower, which I won despite my puny two-plus years of seniority. I had a steady job! Millburn was on the electrified main line 17 miles west of Hoboken Terminal; its manual-lever interlocking controlled the turnouts and crossovers that reduced the triple track from Hoboken to double track west up the 3-mile grade to Summit.

Management foibles? In spring 1955, a “pre-arranged detour” (as opposed to an emergency one to bypass a derailment or such) was established between Millburn and Summit to provide for single-track operation. It was in effect daily following the morning rush hour. The purpose was to permit a work train to distribute rail—more than 1,500 39-foot “sticks” totaling 1,060 tons—for installation on both main tracks later that summer. Setting up the detour allowed the midday local passenger trains, operating on 30-minute headway in both directions, to run past the work extra with minimum delay.

No sooner had the rail been distributed, though, than the work train returned and proceeded to reload all 1,060 tons of it! Once this was accomplished, the rail was redistributed to the Summit cut, a depression through the heart of the community just west of Summit Tower. Rumor had it that this costly change of plans was ordered by a top company officer who lived near the cut and was the recipient of noise complaints from influential neighbors.

Needless to say, later that year the work train reappeared at Millburn and proceeded to distribute new rail for installation on the original segment. In all fairness, I was not in a position to know the cause of these managerial machinations, be they executive arrogance or the failure of the Maintenance of Way folks to argue the wastefulness in labor, crews, and fuel of rearranging the sequence of rail replacement. The obvious conclusion to this business-school graduate, though, was that the costs of the “additions and betterments” for that year were needlessly high.

Following a financially mediocre 1954 and a promising start to ’55, Mother Nature made her contribution to the Lackawanna’s ultimate downfall. Late in the afternoon of August 18, Hurricane Diane struck the Pocono Mountains with a steady torrential downpour. Lazy mountain streams rose at an alarming rate, some as much as 30 feet. The Delaware River flooded its valley sufficiently to reach the eaves of the Water Gap station. Sunrise on the following day found the Lackawanna main line and two branches severed at 88 locations. A 400-foot-long, double-track bridge and two major culverts were destroyed. Six trains and 17 diesels were stranded in the 59 miles between

The ABC’s of DL&W F units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nos.</th>
<th>Models</th>
<th>Built</th>
<th>DB/SG</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>EMD Order</th>
<th>Gearing</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>621 A-B-C</td>
<td>F3 A-B-A</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>DB</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>E1002</td>
<td>65:12</td>
<td>“Drag A-B-A”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: DB = Dynamic brake equipped; SG = Steam generator equipped
Sources: EMD Product Reference Data 1957, Extra 2200 South 1968—J.D.I.
Phoebe and her friends

Lackawanna jumped into the postwar, lightweight streamliner waters in 1949 when it inaugurated the daytime Phoebe Snow, but her cars were among a fleet delivered by the three major carbuilders of the time also for service on her nighttime opposites, the Hoboken-Buffalo Westerner and the eastbound New Yorker. The former offered a 5 a.m. connection to Nickel Plate 7, also the Westerner, while DL&W’s New Yorker connected off nameless NKP Chicago-Buffalo train 8 at 11 p.m.

American Car & Foundry supplied 15 coaches and 9 “10&8” (10 roomettes, 6 double bedrooms) sleepers; Pullman-Standard 10 coaches; and Budd 2 dining cars and 2 observation-tavern-lounge cars. The diners and obs cars were for Phoebe exclusively, but the coaches and sleepers were also for the night trains, which continued to utilize heavyweight dining cars after getting the lightweight coaches and sleepers in 1950.

The Westerner and New Yorker were discontinued by DL&W successor Erie Lackawanna in 1963. The Phoebe Snow name was shifted by EL to the former Erie Chicago-Hoboken Lake Cities service, which lasted until 1966.—J. David Ingles

John Dziobko

Phoebe’s two tavern-observations, one of which rested at Hoboken Terminal on May 19, 1956, survive in business use on Metro-North.

the Delaware River and Scranton, Pa.

In an achievement reflecting credit on railroading in general, and DL&W management and the engineering department in particular, through service was restored in just 28 days. Permanent casualties included 10 miles of track No. 4 between Scranton and Elmhurst, Pa., and almost 3 miles converted from double to single track between the Delaware Water Gap and East Stroudsburg.

The total cost of repairs and restoration was held to $7.5 million, of which $5.4 million was charged to current operations resulting in a net loss for 1955 of $986,000. In spite of this natural disaster, the railroad continued to move forward with reducing fixed debt to the tune of almost $7 million during the year. This, combined with the flood expense, caused a weakening in net current assets of $11.3 million, a substantial amount at the time.

Merger premonitions

The Lackawanna and the Nickel Plate had a long and successful history of interchanging coaches, sleepers, and large blocks of manifest freight over the Buffalo gateway. At this time, the Lackawanna owned 17.8 percent of NKP stock, which paid it dividends of over $1 million in 1955. The original thought behind this investment was to pave the way, God and the Interstate Commerce Commission willing, toward an end-to-end merger. Nickel Plate’s specialty was moving freight fast, which it did between Buffalo and Chicago, Peoria, and St. Louis—the Lackawanna, in effect, put the “New York” in NKP’s official name: New York, Chicago & St. Louis.

However, in the Lackawanna’s 1955 annual report, there appeared a single sentence indicating plans to distribute 13 percent of this NKP holding as a stock dividend during 1956. Reading between the lines, one must conclude that the hopes of merger, long opposed by NKP presumably owing to Lackawanna’s heavy outstanding debt, were being acknowledged as unrealistic.

The same annual report mentioned several areas of potential savings through facilities coordination with parallel and long-time rival Erie Railroad, “without involving in any way the question of merger.” This statement offers significant insight into the Lackawanna’s thinking regarding this option as late as March 15, 1956 (the issuance date of the annual report).

Specifically, Erie and DL&W freight stations at Binghamton and Elmira, N.Y., were combined in November 1955. Other projects being studied included the integration of the two roads’ marine departments serving New York harbor, the possibility of rerouting all Erie passenger service from its terminal in Jersey City into the Lackawanna’s Hoboken Terminal, and the combination of 75 miles of parallel main lines in western New York State.

In 1956, driven by gross revenues of almost $89 million, Lackawanna succeeded in bringing more than $5 million to the bottom line, earning $3.06 per share. New equipment installed included its last new road diesels, 500 boxcars, 100 covered hoppers, more piggyback flats, and five diesel tugboats for New York harbor service. The road diesels were two Fairbanks-Morse 2,400 h.p. Train Masters, Nos. 860-861, which unlike Nos. 850-859 from 1953, lacked steam generators.

Unfortunately, it was destined to be all downhill from here.

On October 13, 1956, I was unceremoniously pulled from my sinecure at Millburn and installed as second leverman at West End Tower, where the Boonton Branch joined the main line for the final 2 miles into Hoboken Terminal. The change was “necessary” owing to the implementation of Step 1 of the terminal coordination project with the Erie. Since this was also a day job with a higher rate of pay, I had no objection to filling in until the job was permanently assigned.

An additional electropneumatic interlocking machine had been installed to accommodate the rerouting of the Erie’s passenger traffic. This machine controlled a new Bergen Junction, where Erie trains from its main line, its Bergen County Cutoff, and two branch lines entered the multiple-track Boonton Branch of the Lackawanna. The machine also controlled the new Greenwood Lake Junction, where trains from that branch as well as the Newark Branch entered our Boonton Branch.

All of these additions notwithstanding, the second leverman position was hardly necessary given that under Step 1, the only rush-hour Erie train routed through West End was No. 6, the Lake Cities from Chicago and Cleveland. All off-peak and weekend trains were to use Hoboken Terminal, but absent the rush-hour traffic, the regular weekday staff of one leverman to line the routes and one operator to handle communi-
cations should have been adequate. This would change in March 1957 when all Erie passenger trains were shifted to Hoboken, but I was destined to view this final consolidation from a different perspective.

**Deeper studies**

Toward the end of 1956, Lackawanna uncharacteristically recruited an outsider into its operating management ranks, one Lynn B. Coleman, formerly superintendent for the Rio Grande at Grand Junction, Colo. It soon became apparent that Coleman’s charge as General Superintendent, among other things, was to overhaul Lackawanna’s overly conservative motive-power policy for the improvement of the gross ton-miles per freight-train-hour statistic. Of interest is that Lackawanna and Rio Grande were similar in size, traffic, profile, and operations, this being well before D&RGW’s inauguration of a policy of short, fast freight trains.

Effective January 1, 1957, I was promoted into management ranks—to the lowest rung of the corporate ladder. The position was Transportation Inspector, essentially a “car chaser” working out of the Manager of Transportation’s office in New York. My basic duty was to travel all our yards searching for violations of FRA car-service rules, which alienated one forever from local managers. My immediate project, though, was to audit dispatcher train sheets to evaluate options for routing freight over parallel DL&W and Erie line segments to advance the merger study, which finally had been acknowledged. Former Erie dispatcher Jack O’Connor did the honors for our potential partner.

Unfortunately, the study contained a major anomaly—the base months selected for comparison were in 1956, before Lackawanna had addressed its perennial problem of underpowered freights. Lackawanna’s route between the New York waterfront and Binghamton, N.Y., was 21 miles shorter than Erie’s and was not subject to the New York state full-crew law east of Scranton. However, the use of two- and three-unit freight diesels necessitated costly helper engines on virtually all DL&W trains through the Pocono Mountains in both directions.

Erie’s route, on the other hand, had two short helper districts for eastbound traffic, and its four-unit diesels frequently attacked those grades unassisted. Needless to say, the study’s recommendation was to route the lion’s share of traffic on the Erie side. (Years later, while riding over the superbly aligned New Jersey Cutoff, I heard Erie Lackawanna General Superintendent J. M.
Moonshower abusing this decision and contrasting this Lackawanna trackage with Erie’s Delaware Division, which had 189 curves in less than 100 miles!

Step 2 of the New Jersey passenger terminal coordination project was implemented as scheduled in March. Its success was a tribute to those responsible for planning operations, especially the movements between Hoboken Terminal itself and some Erie equipment storage facilities still in use in Jersey City, which would be accessed via a new connection to the freight-only Weehawken Branch.

One problem requiring careful supervision was the loading of the Hudson River passenger ferries to prevent overcrowding during the morning rush hour. Each weekday morning, several of us “minor league” managers, armed with thumb-actuated counting devices, were assigned to the ramps at the ferry slips (three to each) to try to determine when the boats were approaching capacity. As the combined count neared the saturation point, we would signal the gateman, who would, in turn, attempt to hold the attacking mob at bay and close the gates. The crowds cooperated, and no injuries were reported.

On October 16, 1957, Lackawanna’s operating department was reorganized to achieve more rigid control of service. The Scranton and Buffalo divisions were combined and a new, 24-hour Office of Transportation Supervisors was established at Scranton. Its responsibility was to assign all motive power and oversee the makeup, dispatch, and performance of system freight service. The formerly “independent” two- and three-unit F-unit sets were reassigned, to the extent possible, into four-unit locomotives with common inspection dates. Making this difficult was the lack of nose receptacles for jumper cables on the 45 cab units and that the FT’s were connected by drawbars. Nevertheless, the symbol freights were finally being dispatched with adequate power for Lackawanna’s rugged profile.

General Superintendent Coleman’s effort to rationalize the diesel fleet encountered two minor setbacks. Concurrent with realigning the freight power, it was decided to continue the use of two E8’s on passenger trains east of Scranton but cut back to a single unit on the same trains between Scranton and Buffalo. (This resurrected the old steam practice, which saw 4-8-4’s on passenger trains on the east end but 4-6-4’s on the west end.) This experiment came to an abrupt halt after the single E8 on a 10-car westbound Phoebe Snow experienced the failure of one of the unit’s two prime movers west of Elmira, N.Y., with the result that the streamliner stalled on York Hill.

In an effort to reduce down time for the scarce freight diesels, it was decided to send them out from the paint shop in plain gray dress with maroon lettering and yellow grab handles in lieu of the traditional gray with maroon and gold lettering.
striping. As I recall, engines 655 and 656 were the guinea pigs. Although the front office, thankfully, shot down this proposal, a compromise was reached in that henceforth, all passenger and freight road engines received the more practical passenger paint scheme.

Retrenchment begins

For 1957, the Lackawanna managed to eke out a miniscule net profit of $430,000, but the hard truths of railroad economics in the Northeast came home to roost the following year. DL&W's suburban passenger-service deficit and confiscatory property taxes, primarily in Hudson County, N.J., continued unabated as gross revenues dropped to their lowest annual total since 1946. The resultant net deficit for 1958 totaled almost $4 million.

In addition to the institutional problems, the need to replace the aging double-track swing bridge over the Hackensack River at West Secaucus, N.J., could not be postponed. The replacement, a single-track vertical lift bridge together with the necessary interlocking changes, cost $5.5 million.

One of the many problems facing the Lackawanna was excess track capacity. Although the proposed coordination of facilities with the Erie in upstate New York would address this problem on DL&W's west end, fewer train movements on the east end (outside of suburban territory) required immediate action. An obvious target for plant rationalization was the 28-mile, double-track cutoff between Port Morris Junction, N.J., and the Delaware River. Long regarded by Lackawanna men as a state-of-the-art "super railroad" (long before John W. Barriger coined the term), the cutoff boasted a grade-separated right of way that, eastward, ascended the 618 feet from the river to the New Jersey watershed on a maximum grade of 29 feet to the mile. The line had only 14 curves, all but one of 2 degrees or less. This superb alignment through the rolling northwest Jersey terrain, completed in 1911, was accomplished by cut-and-fill engineering that necessitated relocating 15 million cubic yards of material. The Pequest fill alone was more than 3 miles long and averaged 110 feet above the valley floor.

Ignoring the "pride factor," management saw that the average 21 trains per day could be run without big delay on CTC-signaled single track. Accordingly, the westbound main was retired between mileposts 48.2 and 72.2 save for a 3-mile double siding at Greendell.

On March 2, 1959, the Lackawanna, desperate for cash, finally abandoned its dream of merger with the Nickel Plate and liquidated its NKP investment, realizing $15.3 million. This windfall paid off the Upper Hackensack bridge replacement loan and brought all unpaid bills to current status. August 31 marked the beginning of joint operation using 75.5 miles of the Erie main line between Binghamton and Gibson, N.Y.

Of greater significance was the June 24 signing of the Joint Agreement of Merger with the Erie and the subsequent filing on July 1 of the application for merger with the ICC. Not surprisingly, 97 percent of Lackawanna's stock was voted for the merger. Industry opposition was limited to token objections from four connecting carriers.

Port Morris drills

At this time, although still an assistant trainmaster, I was headquartered at Port Morris yard, 46 miles west of Hoboken, and more or less "on my own." My principal responsibilities included the operation of what was basically an interchange yard with five regular yard-crew assignments daily. In addition, five local freights, or "drills" as they were called on our railroad, originated from Port Morris serving Paterson, Boonton, Dover, Summit, and the Sussex Branch. There was also a nightly interchange run, Nos. 71 and 66, to Phillipsburg, N.J., where a daily yard crew made and received deliveries with the Pennsylvania, Jersey Central, and Lehigh Valley. New England traffic was routed to and from the New Haven Railroad connection at Maybrook, N.Y., via two Lehigh & Hudson River round trips terminating and originating at Port Morris daily. Port Morris was the perfect assignment for on-the-job training, but even this outpost could produce career jeopardizing situations, as we shall soon see.

All operating supervisors were re-
In August 1957, I'd been promoted to assistant trainmaster, headquartered for training purposes at Hoboken. Although I was pleased to have my name appear on the employee timetable, I soon would experience one of those unforeseen operating snafus that can cause the company public relations problems and also nip supervisory careers in the bud. On this occasion, the Passaic County Democratic Club was sponsoring a cruise on the Hudson River, and chartered two 12-car trains from the Lackawanna to take participants to the Hoboken docks on a September Sunday morning. The trains would lay over all day and return the passengers to their suburban stations in the evening.

One of these specials was under my purview, and everything went without a hitch on the morning run. The trains each were made up of 12 electric M.U. cars, from the storage yard at Dover, with motive power provided by an FM Train Master diesel. This set the stage for embarrassment, because the train-line communication connections on the electric cars were not compatible with the air-communicating whistle in the diesel. This forced us to use hand signals to depart from stations.

It was well after dinnertime when the excursion boat returned to Hoboken. We loaded the revelers, many of whom had spent the cruise imbibing, and started for home. The head two cars were empty save for a youth obviously suffering from a beating and his two alleged assailants seated behind and sullenly observing their victim. I smelled potential trouble in getting them off my train without incident, so I climbed over onto the locomotive and had the train stopped at a wayside phone so I could call the dispatcher and tell him to notify the police to meet us at Paterson, our combatants' intended destination.

Two Paterson patrolmen were waiting as we arrived, and the toughs were offloaded without incident. The head brake-man, using an ancient kerosene lantern, then attempted to pass a highball signal to his conductor farther back along the train, but because the westward platform at Paterson was on the outside of a curve, the engineer couldn't see the conductor or the progress of the passenger unloading. But he did see the head brakie's signal, so he whistled off and headed west! Within two minutes, I was met by our veteran conductor, Barney Rice, who told me we still had some 300 angry Democrats on board, whose detraining at Paterson had been interrupted by our premature departure!

Thinking fast, I arranged to have the locomotive run around our train at Lincoln Park, 8 miles to the west, and return east to get the people to their intended destination. (Backing up the train to Paterson without the communicating whistle would have been too dangerous.) Once we unloaded the rest of the Paterson passengers, we made another run-around move in Paterson Junction yard where, fortunately, our 189-ton locomotive stayed atop the ancient 85-lb. rail! Even after providing the superintendent with a report of this fiasco, I remained employed.—John R. Canfield

When DL&W gave the Democrats the run-around

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quired to make a full slate of monthly “efficiency tests,” the unannounced creation of conditions requiring crews, operators, and dispatchers to respond precisely as the Standard Code of Operating Rules required. Many of these tests involved changing signal indications or darkening color-light signals and observing the response of engine men. One less-than-popular test involved Rule 796 and called for the placement of temporary slow-order signs along a main track in high-speed territory. If the crew had not been forewarned by bulletin or train order, a speed of 10 mph was mandatory. This test was the direct result of the tragic Woodbridge, N.J., wreck on February 5, 1951, in which a speeding Pennsylvania Railroad commuter train overlooked these warning signs, derailed, and rolled down an embankment, killing more than 100 passengers.

On the last Friday of August 1959, I realized I hadn’t made my quota of tests for the month. Aware that train No. 5, The Twilight, was running with an advance section in anticipation of heavy Labor Day weekend traffic, I hurried out on the cutoff and set the portable advance warning board, the slow board, and the resume-speed board with a mechanically actuated speed-measuring clock between the latter two signs. I had no way of knowing that Paul Donovan, a Scranton Division trainmaster, was also planning to waylay the two sections of No. 5 with a signal test that same afternoon!

Both engine crews responded properly to my surprise test, and I headed for home. Later that evening, I received a phone call from an irate Morris & Essex Division Superintendent Craddock. It seems that DL&W President Perry Shoemaker was riding the locomotive of regular No. 5 and, having been delayed twice within 25 miles, wanted to know “why all the local supervision was waiting until the end of the month to make their test quotas.”

There is no proper answer to such a charge, other than we were, of course, ignorant of our president’s travel plans. Privately, I thought our top executive should be pleased that his first-line troops were on the ball, but Mr. Shoemaker probably suspected that the tests were for his benefit, which was certainly not the case.

That incident notwithstanding, on April 1, 1960, I was promoted to trainmaster, still assigned to Port Morris, then soon moved to the Scranton Division, assigned to the “cement territory” of the Bangor & Portland (Pa.) branch. There, I would witness first-hand the steady erosion of traffic, in this case bulk cement diverted to air-activated tank trucks. Peak loadings at the six mills served by the Lackawanna dwindled from the 230 to 240 carloads on Fridays of previous summers to an anemic 90 cars during this last summer of our independent operation.

The Lackawanna’s fortunes continued to decline through the remainder of 1960, and on October 17, we merged with our old “hated” rival, the Erie. Said President Shoemaker, “Upon merger, the Lackawanna will go out of existence as a company which has never gone into bankruptcy, and as a company proud of its heritage and tradition of giving superior service to the public.” I can only add a heartfelt “Amen.”
When this picture was taken on June 27, 1946, the 192-mile Pittsburgh & Lake Erie, known as the “Little Giant,” had 244 steam locomotives, more than one per mile but necessary to serve what was said to be one industry per mile: the prosperous mines and mills of the Pittsburgh and Youngstown districts. The McKees Rocks shops complex in the Pittsburgh suburb of that name was the heart of the P&LE; men at “the Rocks” could fix or rebuild virtually any piece of rolling stock. But change was in the wind. Less than six months after this photo, P&LE bought its first diesels, two Fairbanks-Morse H10-44’s. Although seven 2-8-4’s came in 1948, they only lasted five years [Spring 2004 CLASSIC TRAINS]; P&LE dieselized with 96 units in 1953. The tender and coach shop became the diesel shop [page 64, Fall 2009], but the roundhouses and much of the other steam infrastructure were demolished. Today, the only P&LE tracks in use here are the mains in the foreground, as CSX’s Keystone Division. The Pittsburgh, Chartiers & Youghiogheny, jointly owned by P&LE and PRR, now is Gene-see & Wyoming’s Pittsburgh & Ohio Central. Its general office is the sole rail building in this photo intact and serving its original purpose. The Bell Avenue area has been totally redeveloped, and there are no buildings left between the PC&Y and McKees Rocks bridge. Only the old machine and erection shop, store house, blacksmith shop, paint shop, and boiler and tank shop still stand.