



# **O&W'S SCRANTON DIVISION**

## **VOLUME II**

### **FROM COAL DRAGS TO FAST FREIGHTS**



It has been two decades since the Scranton Division commenced operation and the reviews are mixed. Management has been praised for its aggressive program of acquisitions and willingness to spend large amounts of money. Over the years there has been a great increase in the railroad's profitability. Other analysts have pointed to the thin anthracite reserves along its line, the lowest of any anthracite carrier, and a lagging performance in revenue per mile versus competitors. In 1915, the ICC stated the Scranton Division was "unnecessary" as the pre-existing six carriers in the anthracite region were sufficient to provide service. A policy of conserving cash for capital expenditures ended under New Haven stock control in 1905 as a two-decade period of dividend payouts began. Subsidiaries, Scranton Coal and Elk Hill Coal & Iron, stopped paying interest on their second mortgages held by the O&W in 1906 when they could no longer avail themselves of freight rates lower than the advertised tariff rates, a situation which constituted financial aid from the railroad.

The anthracite industry will grow in fits and starts until its peak production year of 1917. Early in the era of this volume, the O&W will still be engaged in a vigorous program of capital improvements to handle increasing coal traffic. The entire route between the anthracite collection point at Mayfield Yard and the Hudson River coal terminal at Cornwall will have to be double-tracked to handle passenger, merchandise and coal traffic expeditiously. The Capouse Branch will be extended from Cayuga Jct. to a connection with the LV at Sibley Jct. Larger and larger coal cars will be acquired. After delivery of another class of 2-8-0's, O&W will wean itself off a total reliance on the 2-8-0 for coal traffic by acquiring 2-10-2's and two versions of 4-8-2's.

While prospects for further growth of O&W's coal business appear constrained by dwindling coal reserves among its customers and competition with larger, more entrenched rivals, a new source of traffic will develop midway through the three-decade period covered by this volume. In 1926, a new role as a bridge line for merchandise freight between LV and DL&W, at Coxtton Yard and Cayuga, Jct., respectively, and the New Haven at Maybrook Yard will begin. This fast freight service will never attain the fame or receive a catchy name to match the much older Central States Dispatch or the Alphabet Route which will start a couple years later. But it will grow and offer hope. Symbol freights will begin during the presidency of J. B. Kerr, continue under J. H. Nuelle and be pushed energetically by F. E. Lyford, the first bankruptcy trustee and a veteran of a decade of employment on LV. Lyford will repeatedly push LV management to improve their fast freight service to and from Buffalo in conjunction with the O&W and in competition with DL&W/L&HR.

Dozens of collieries will be switched by O&W mine crews in this era but only a handful will be substantial sources of tonnage. Financial failure of its associated coal companies will drag the railroad in 1937 into the morass of a twenty-year bankruptcy. Efforts to reorganize and escape the oversight of the bankruptcy court will be made. If only the bridge line traffic on the 135-mile Mayfield/Maybrook route could lift up the entire railroad. Train crews will do their best to move their trains swiftly over the road. Dispatchers will do everything they can to expedite these movements. Operating employees know "we all catch H---- for detention to these trains." And the sales department, with representatives across the nation, will beat the bushes looking for business. No one is giving up. Maybe the railroad can be reorganized.

Dozens of letters between and among O&W, DL&W and LV officials in addition to O&W publications provide the basis for substantial discussion of the planning, implementation and streamlining of the O&W's symbol freight operations between its western connections and Maybrook Yard, "the Gateway to Southern New England".

246 pages, glossy paper, indexed, bibliography, 32 illustrations/photos, 26 maps/diagrams and 77 RR documents