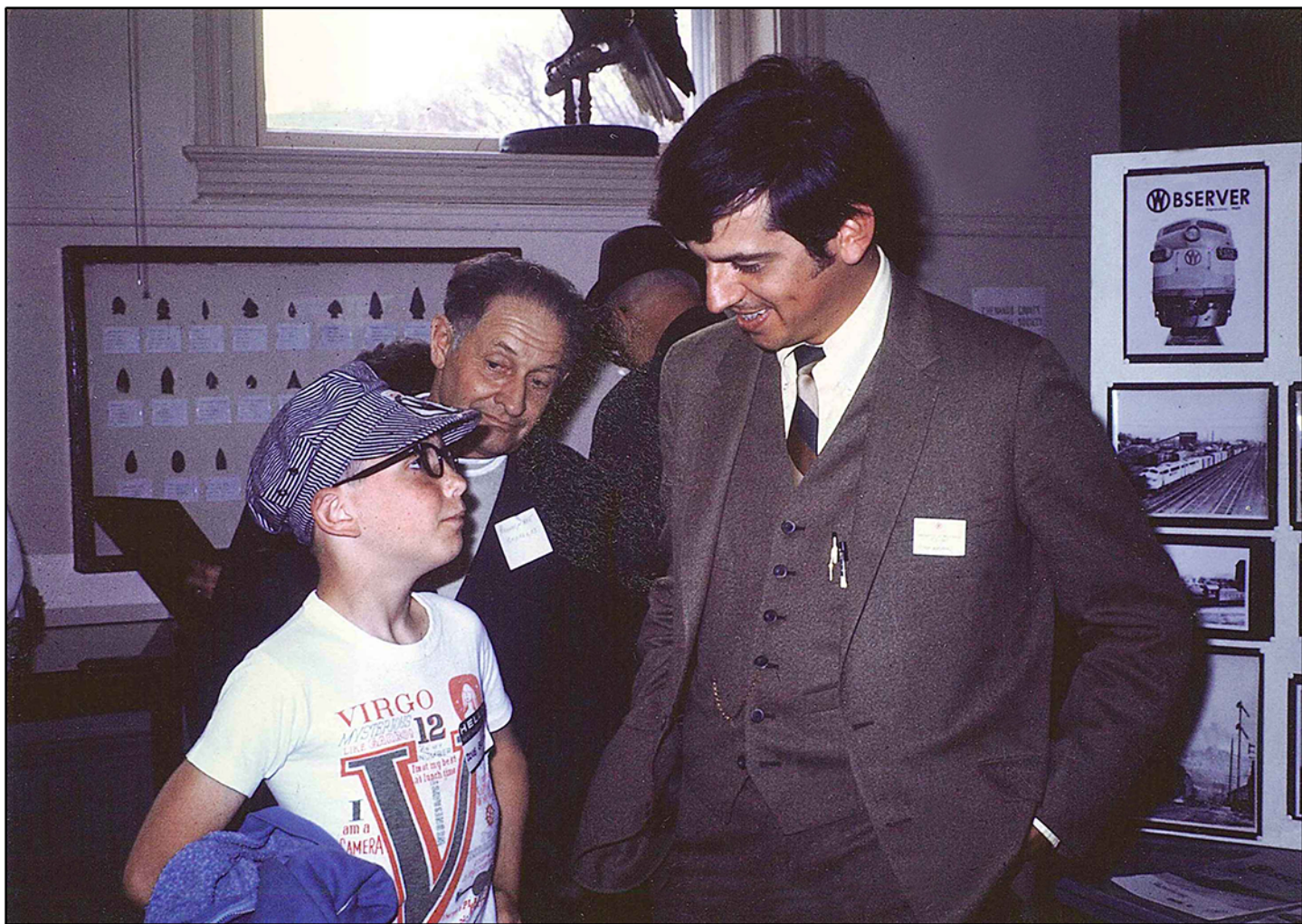


Digging Deeper With Doug Ellison

Number 5 in a Series

Linkages In Time

My dream through childhood growing up in Upstate New York had been to embark on a career in railroading. Truth be told, I was deeply disappointed that the O&W was gone, torn up and abandoned leaving an ugly scar across the landscape. Maybe, just maybe I could one day rebuild it and bring it back bigger and better than ever before. Eventually the youthful dream of rebuilding the O&W faded, melted away with the dawning of adulthood and reality, however not so much the desire to make railroading a career in some way. That dream came true, even though it was not an easy path and took me, at times, far from my childhood home and roots.



The Spring 1971 O&W meeting at Norwich, NY, back when the dream of rebuilding the O&W was still fresh and alive. I'm awed in meeting and chatting with Bob Mohowski, and in reverence of being in the same room with so many O&W veterans. John Treen Photo.

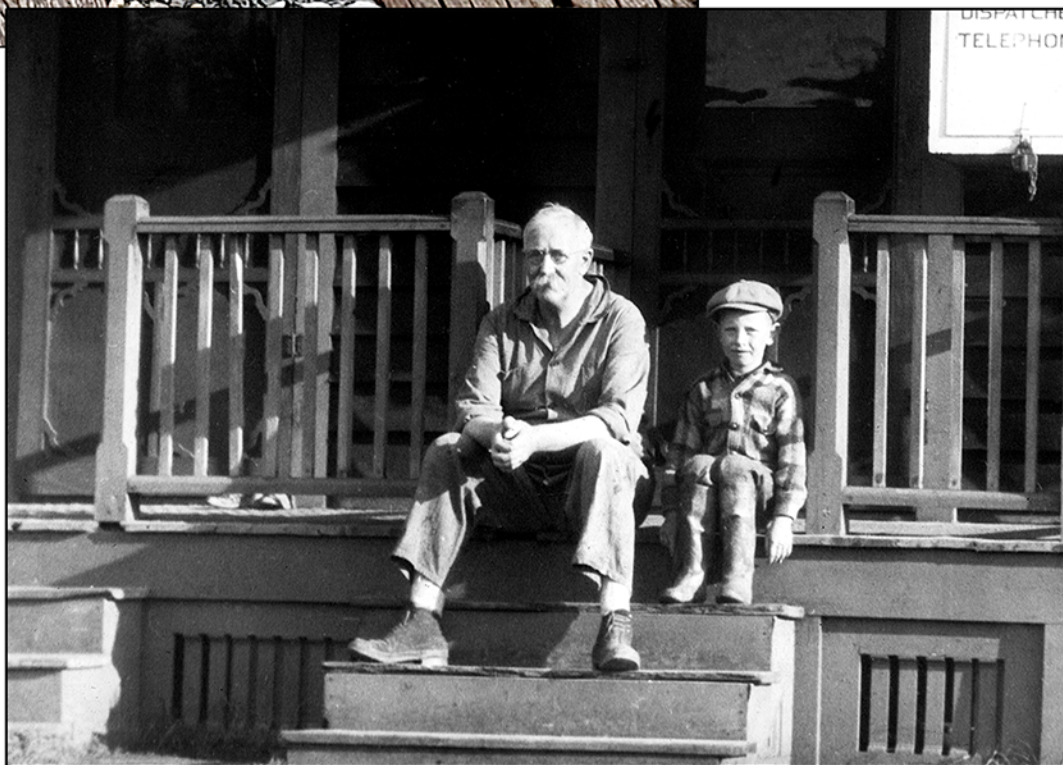
It was a career as a railroader and rail consultant that set my boots on the ground from the shores of eastern Maine to Alaska, Hawaii and Mexico, and about everywhere in between. From freezing cold in the Arctic watershed of northern Ontario, to spitting sand out of my mouth in the hundred-degree heat of the sand dune covered rails of Southwest Texas. From the Adirondacks to the Pacific Northwest, and thence to the kudzu covered rights of way of western Georgia and the potash lines of the old Santa Fe in New Mexico.

In July of 2020 I was Vice President of Engineering & Mechanical for the NYS&W Railway based out of Cooperstown, NY. It would be the last stop before retirement in a long and rewarding career. On this

particular sunny summer afternoon I was over on our industrial tracks out of Utica, NY that were in need of some attention. One of these lines was the former West Shore that served New York Mills and the other was none other than the northern end of the former NYO&W's Utica Division in New Hartford. As I gazed down at the rails in front of me I noted the stamping on the web. "L.S. Co. Buffalo 750 3 1905", translated as 75 lb. / yard rail rolled by Lackawanna Steel Company in March 1905. Suddenly I was taken back to my railroad roots. My great-grandfather Jay Whalen had hired on as a telegrapher on the O&W's Northern Division in 1908. (see my story "O&W Northern Division Roots" for more). It was then I realized that these were the exact same rails my great-grandfather traveled over in his O&W career, and that my grandmother, aunts and uncle had also made many journeys on between their home in Hamilton and the "big city" of Utica as children.



Gazing down at the rail in front of me, and the epiphany that these were the same rails my great-grandfather rode over a hundred years before.



My great-grandfather Jay Whalen poses at the Summit station between Oxford and Guilford in 1927 with his son John ("Unc" to me). They made many trips between Hamilton and Utica over the steel rails still being used in 2020.

With that realization was the epiphany that these steel rails were more than just links from one place to another, they were linkages in time as well. They were linking me to not only the O&W, but the O&W of the past, a time of another era when they were part of the life of, and the breadwinner and sustenance for my family of long ago. Today they were doing the same for me, these very same steel rails were where I was making my living. After years of travel and career trials and tribulations, I was home, home to the O&W, and linked through her steel ribbons to my family of the past. Those years from my childhood dreaming of growing up and becoming a railroader went racing through my mind. So too did the memory of those dreams about rebuilding the O&W. And here I was in the final years of my career working on the O&W. Home at last, home at last.



Looking north from Bridge #45 over Sauquoit Creek on September 19, 2019.



The view in 2019 looking south across the Sauquoit Creek bridge at O&W Milepost 271.84. One of the bridges on my list of responsibilities.



Nearly the same view as above, this view was taken from the south end of the bridge looking towards the New Hartford depot which was built in 1910. You would never know now that the depot or any of the other buildings here existed. Just barely visible in the distance to the left of the depot is a West Shore train heading east towards Utica. John Taibi Collection.

Even the fading remains of the New York, Ontario & Western Railway can remind us of the days of glory gone by, the men of steel and the engines of steam. The red markers on the tail end of the train have long since passed, but if you look way down the old roadbed they are still glowing in the distance.

May all of your hopes and dreams come true too, and may the O&W always have a special place in our hearts.

