

A HISTORY OF THE MIDDLETOWN AND NEW JERSEY RAILWAY

1947-2023

NO LONGER THE "MISERABLE AND NEARLY JUNK"



**THE MIDDLETOWN AND NEW JERSEY
RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

The two predecessors of the Middletown & New Jersey Railway have been well documented in print. These are the Middletown, Unionville & Water Gap Railroad and the Middletown & Unionville Railroad. The M&NJ was incorporated relatively recently, in 1947, and thus had a short history compared to its predecessors until late in the past century.

Circa 1994, the M&NJ joined the ranks of railroad companies with its own historical society, the Middletown & New Jersey Railway Historical Society. It was not long until the group commenced quarterly publication of The Unionville Flyer. In early 2024, the officers of the M&NJ RHS anticipated the arrival of volume 30 of their publication. Rather than publish a conventional issue, it was decided to celebrate our 30th anniversary with publication of a comprehensive history of the M&NJ which was now approaching seventy-seven years of service. As The Unionville Flyer had been published for almost thirty of those seventy-seven years, it was viewed as a basic resource for the project. A cooperative effort ensued and the result is this book.

For over sixty years, the M&NJ depended on two General Electric 44-tonners. But in the last sixteen years, the motive power roster has been under almost constant flux as units have arrived and departed, including ex-SP four-axle GE's and ex-NYS&W GP18's as well as leased NS, GATX and NJ Transit power; GP-9, GP-18, B23-7, B30-7, GP38's and GP40-PH-2's.

Most short lines had but one connection. As a short line, M&U/M&NJ may have been unique in interchanging with three large carriers; New York, Ontario & Western, New York, Susquehanna & Western and Erie/Erie Lackawanna. In the heady days when the M&U was a prolific generator of milk traffic, all three connections were ready recipients of reefers at Middletown and M&U Jct. The milk traffic disappeared in the 1940's. The 1950's brought the abandonment of the O&W in 1957 and then 1959 saw NYS&W abandon its Hanford Branch to the M&NJ connection. At least the Erie connection remained and, over the years, it evolved into EL, Conrail and Norfolk Southern, all of which interchanged with the M&NJ in the joint yard at East Main Street, Middletown. Today's expanded M&NJ receives cars from NS at Campbell Hall, on the former Erie/EL/CR/NS Graham Line actually owned by Metro North Commuter Railroad.

For several decades, the M&NJ survived on inbound feed traffic and then that disappeared. Fortunately, three new customers arrived on the scene and their inbound fertilizer, polystyrene pellets and chemicals sustained the railroad for a couple decades. For a short period, the M&NJ participated in the Incentive-Per-Diem box car boom which was touted as a solution to an industry-wide box car shortage. One of the new customers needed box cars to ship plastic containers throughout the Nation and a 500-car fleet of bright blue boxcars, financed by investors, arrived to deliver the product. The box car shortage ended and the M&NJ's customer built more plants which shortened the outbound haul from its Middletown plant to a truck-friendly short haul. The box car fleet returned to the M&NJ which had the responsibility to store the cars until they could be sold off.

Dismal finances have driven management to consider abandonment on several occasions over the decades, but no action was taken beyond placing the lower nine miles of right-of-way in embargoed status. The death of the M&NJ's long-time president and majority owner ushered in a chaotic period wherein a financier overpaid to acquire the railroad with a vision of a multi-state containerized waste-hauling scheme with a backhaul of bulk commodities. A fleet of container flat cars was assembled and a GP9 purchased. The only tangible results were the scrapping of the nine miles of embargoed track and a carload of red ink which resulted in the sale of the M&NJ to an established short line company.

Under experienced management, the remaining five-mile section of the M&NJ has been repeatedly expanded to encompass a network of lines throughout Orange County with a base in Campbell Hall, once the base for EL's local operations in the region. This expanded network is truly remarkable in that it encompasses former trackage of the O&W, Erie/EL, NYS&W, NYNH&H, L&HR and NYC. This greatly expanded M&NJ now serves the former Warwick base of the Lehigh & Hudson River and customers neighboring the New Haven's once massive Maybrook Yard.

This is the colorful narrative of a survivor still poised for further expansion and success.

198 pages, soft cover, glossy paper, indexed, 190 color images and 78 black and white images.