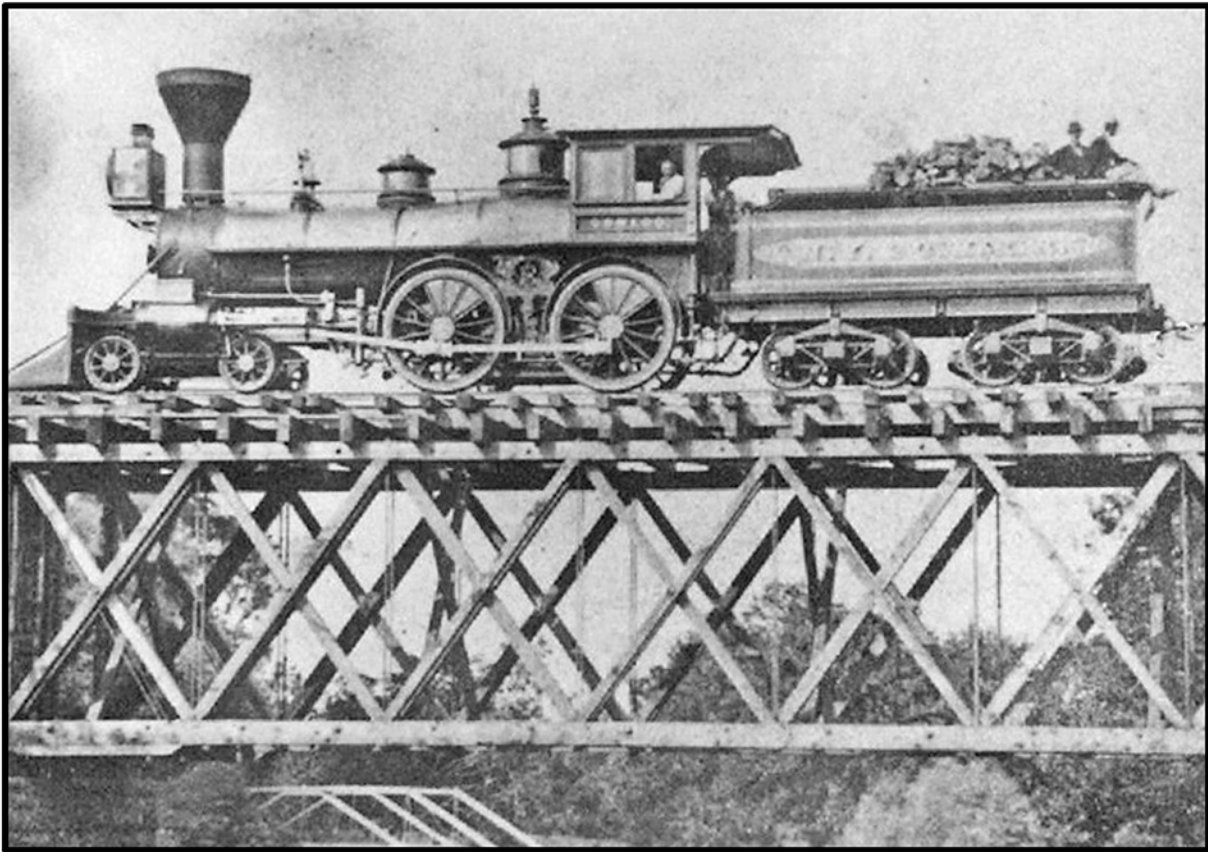


Early Master Mechanics On The Midland
Part I - William H. Griggs
By Richard Palmer



No. 1, the Oswego, atop the trestle over Oneida Creek at Oneida Community in 1869.

One of the most important positions on the New York & Oswego Midland was that of master mechanic. He kept the railroad operating on a daily basis. On a modern railroad he might be called chief mechanical officer or vice president of the mechanical department.

The master mechanic was in charge of all mechanical-related and a few non-mechanical functions. This included the needs, design, maintenance and staffing of shop buildings and support structures. He was responsible for mechanical repairs; the design, implementation, maintenance and repair of all locomotives and rolling stock, and supervision of personnel. In the case of the Midland he also had equipment built of his own design. What he didn't have he designed himself and it was created in the company shops.

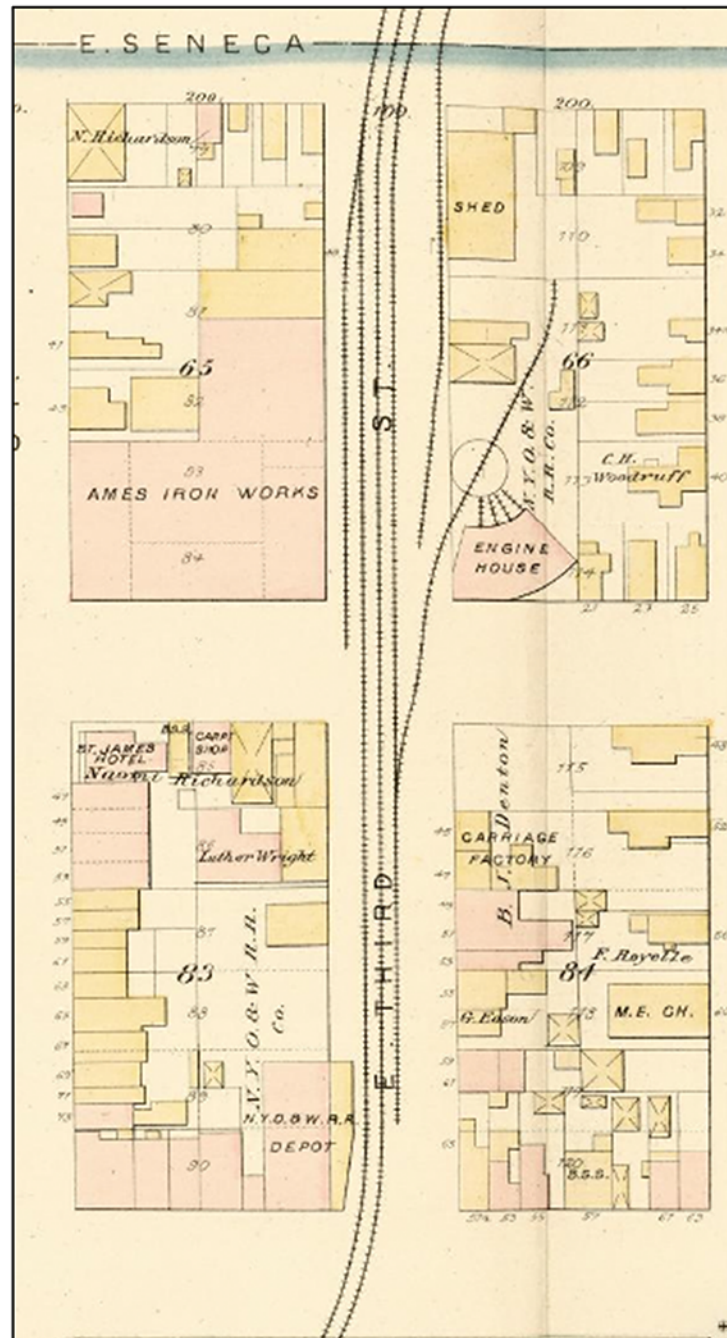
When the New York & Oswego Midland was organized in 1869 Superintendent Addison Day, master mechanic William H. Griggs, three locomotive engineers and two conductors came over from the Rome, Watertown & Ogdensburg.

Griggs was master mechanic on the R.W. & O. for thirteen years. Skilled in his profession, newspapers said he was "every way up to the times" and was "the right man in the right place." He remained with the Midland until August 15, 1874. His brother, George S. Griggs, had been master mechanic of the Boston & Providence Railroad since 1834. He was known for advanced locomotive technology and design.

As of December 1, 1869 the Midland had fourteen locomotives, twelve twelve-wheeled passenger coaches, six baggage, mail and express cars and two hundred forty-two eight-wheeled freight cars. So there was plenty of rolling stock to take care of. The average speed of passenger trains was 30 miles per hour and 25

Construction of the railroad commenced on June 24, 1868. By the end of 1869, 100 of the proposed 240 mile line within New York State had been laid and was open for business. Weight of rail was 57 pounds per yard. The line was built mainly with imported English steel-headed rails. They were fastened together with what were known as "Pratt's Patent Fish-joint Plates" using bolts and rubber washers. This was an early form of "welded rail" and bonded well, keeping both ends of the rails at the same elevation and avoiding wear. The rails were fastened to the ties with screw spikes as used in Europe. Much of this was done at Griggs' insistence.

In 1874 William H. Griggs resigned to become master mechanic of the Utica, Ithaca & Elmira Railroad, succeeding Perry Stevens. Stalled work building the U. I. & E. had been resumed. At the time Griggs was regarded as "one of the best mechanics in this country." In 1885 he became the first superintendent of New York Locomotive Works in Rome. Prior to his death on October 23, 1893 in Dorchester, Mass. at the age of 70 he was in the grocery business.



Oswego Shops