

The Mighty O. & W.



A Railroad with Only 541 Miles of Track, This Plucky Line Is Threatened by Foreclosure

THREE YEARS before the "Golden Spike" was driven at Promontory Point, Utah, to complete the first transcontinental railroad, a group of businessmen representing such points of business as Norwich, Utica, Rome, Oswego, Middletown and Walton in the sovereign state of New York banded together and formed a railroad company known as the New York and Oswego Midland Railroad. This railroad which was later to become the New York, Ontario and Western Railway, went into operation in July, 1871, and its first passenger train was indeed a small affair, consisting of four cars, one of them a mail and baggage car, and a short, stubby locomotive, sporting a

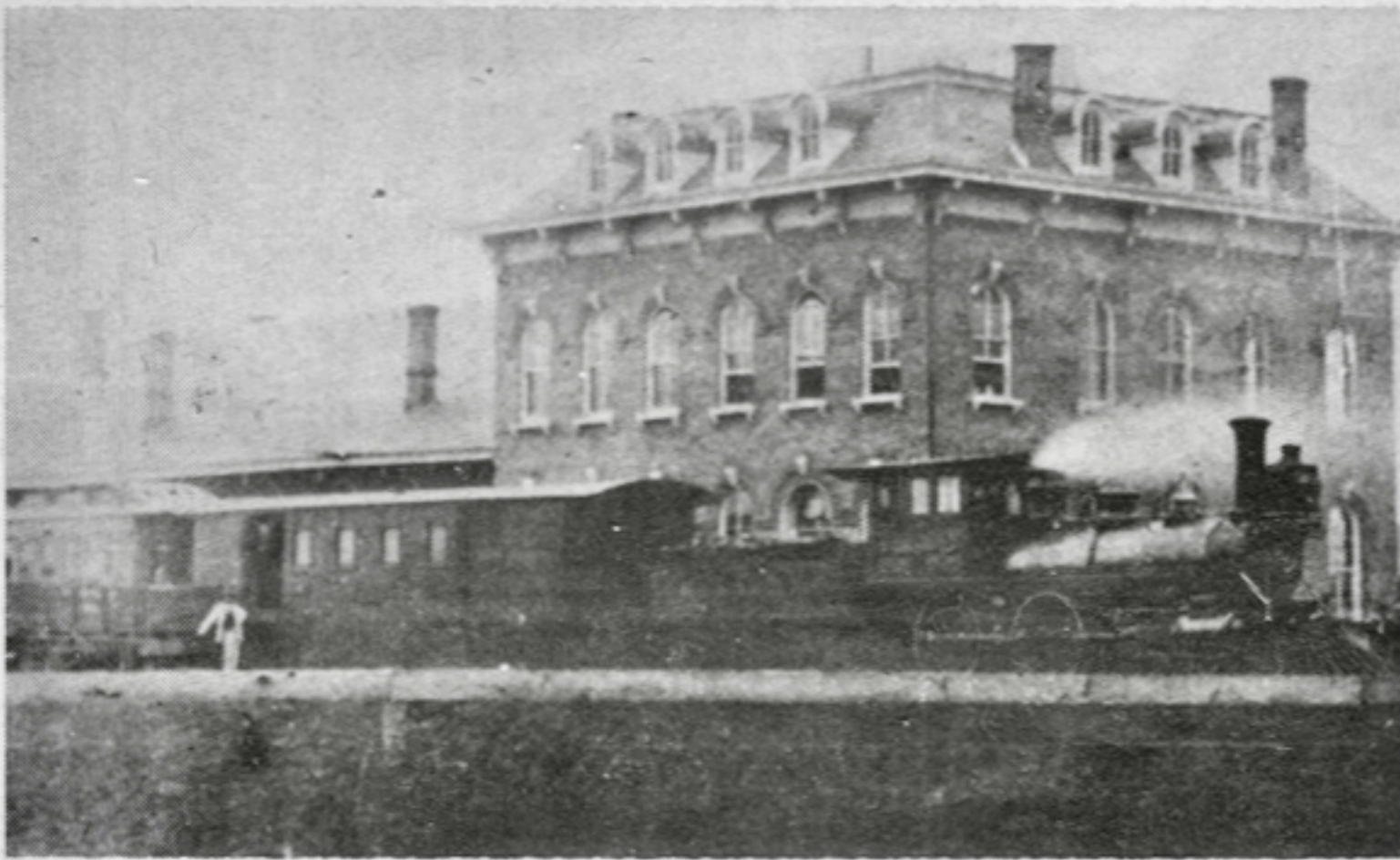
tall firestack and a prominent cow-catcher. The engine had four main drive wheels and four guide wheels and ran on soft coal.

This first representative of what was to become a lifeline to hitherto railless communities throughout central and southern New York steamed confidently out of Middletown bound for Oswego on that hot July day in 1871 and was the first of a fleet of trains, both freight and passenger, to come. Since that day, the New York, Ontario and Western Railway (better known to its admirers as the O. & W.) has sent a continuous stream of engines, passenger cars, freight cars and cabooses trailing through its 541 miles of track from Weehawken,

N. J., to the port of Oswego on Lake Ontario.

Founded in faith by a group of far-seeing businessmen some 84 years ago, this railroad today faces foreclosure and possible bankruptcy through the action of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which is demanding that the railway either pay off the loans made to it some years ago or have their great fleet of diesel engines confiscated. Confiscation of these diesels would theoretically mean the end of the line as such, for the railway is entirely dependent upon these diesels to move their goods.

Back in 1881, when the New York and Oswego Midland Railway became the O. & W., things looked



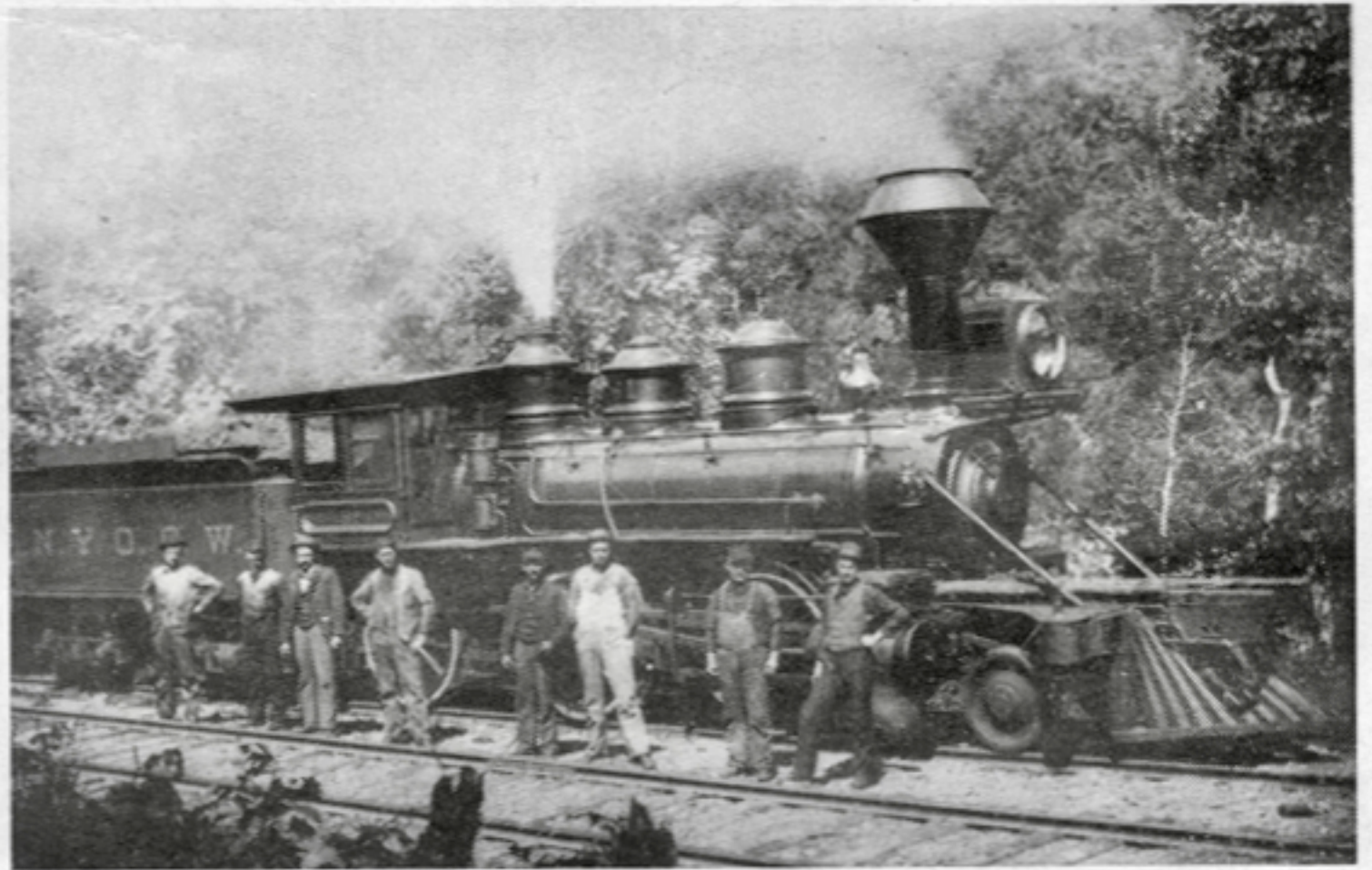
This interesting photograph shows the first through train on the O. & W. from New York to Oswego. Taken on Aug. 17, 1873, it shows the train at the Oneida station.

Tunnels through mountains were enthusiastically dug, and the great steamers, getting larger and larger as the years rolled by, roared and puffed their way through them. Since the O. & W. was in and out of the valleys, great bridges and trestles had to be built to keep the grade from too steep a pitch, and many old railroaders have said that the O. & W. has, for its size, more causeways, bridges and tunnels than any other Eastern line.

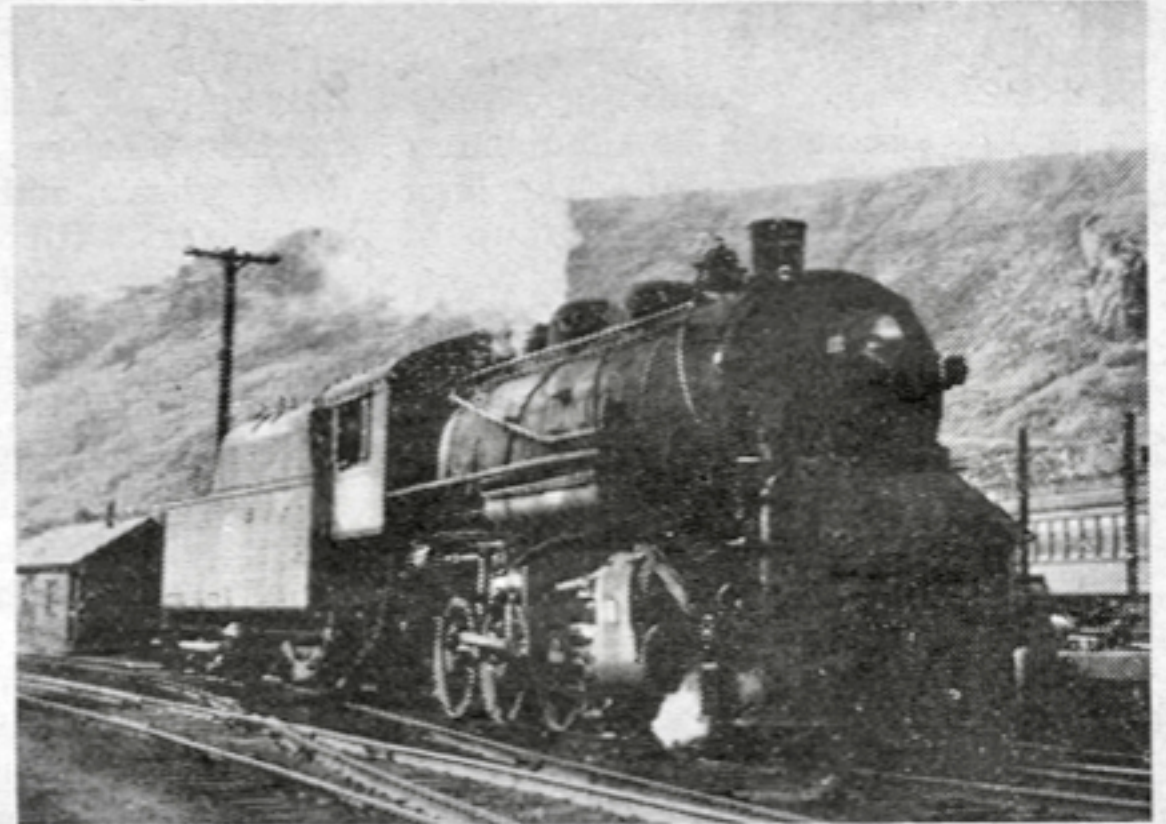
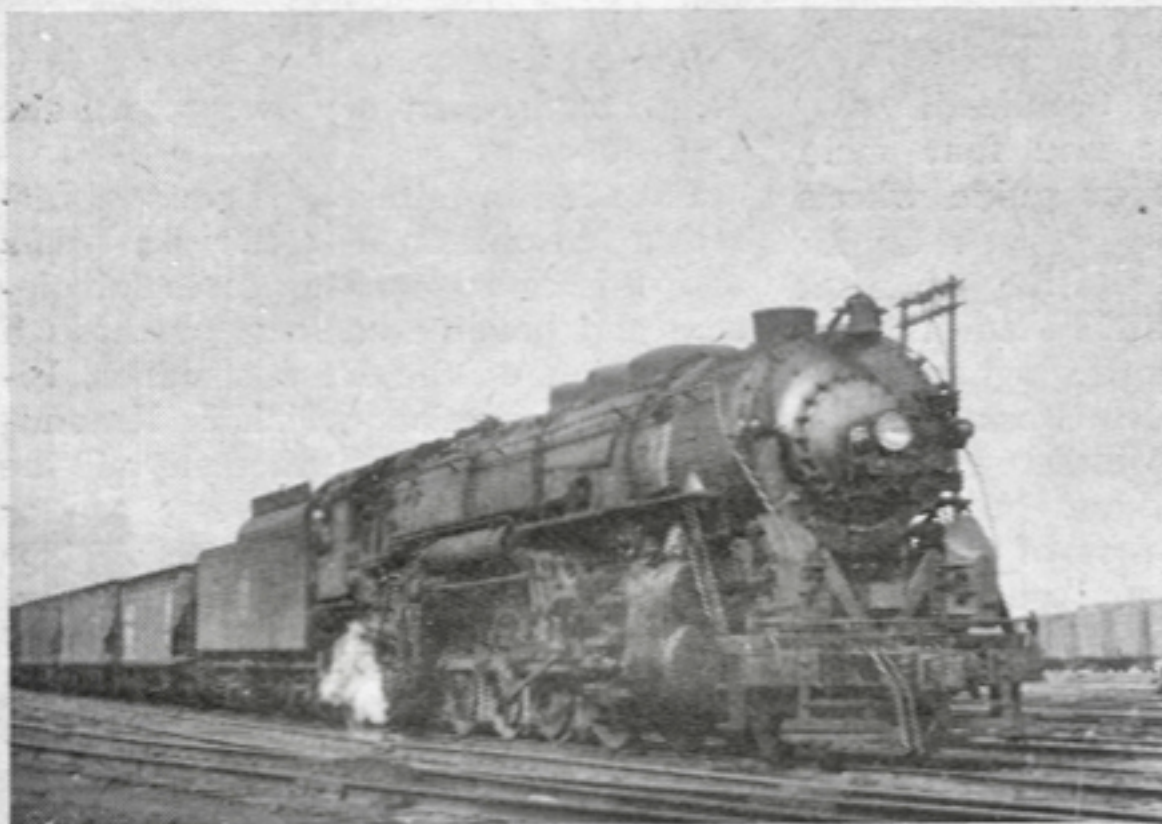
By the 1890s this thriving railroad was serving well over a hundred freight and passenger stations, and was carrying a tremendous amount of produce over its rails. For years it continued to serve these communities faithfully and fully. A sample of the names the stationmaster at Weehawken called out in those days, as the train set forth on its run to Oswego

brighter. The bluestone industry was in full flower throughout the area served by the railroad and there was no competition being offered by trucking firms. To tap important coal regions in and around the Scranton area, an extension of the line was built westward in 1889 from Cadosia, and since then the O. & W. has served as an important mover of anthracite coal from Scranton to New England and the tidewater area of New Jersey and New York.

Branch lines were built to Kingston and Port Jervis, and the line also had many transfer points along the right of way with other railroads. At Scranton it connected with the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad and the Central of New Jersey. At Maybrook, it met the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad and at Oneida, the New York Central made connections.



This old bell-stacked steamer would make a choice item in many a railroader's collection.



Left: A mountain-type 4-8-4 sets off from Weehawken with a long load of freight. Right: The last of the steamers, taken in the Weehawken freight yard in 1947.



Left: The first Diesel locomotive on the O. & W. on its trial run. Right: These five men on the Cadosia freight yard switcher represent 207 years of service on the O. & W. From left to right, they are C. Hunter, conductor, with 43½ years on the line; E. L. Ousterhoudt, trainman, 40 years; G. F. Ousterhoudt, fireman, 35 years; John Ruff, engineer, 42½ years; and A. J. Gross, trainman, 46 years.

would include Cornwall, Fitchcliffe, Maybrook, Middletown, Fair Oaks, Mountain Dale, Fallsburg, Liberty, Livingston Manor, Fish's Eddy, Cadosia, Walton, Franklin, Sidney, Guilford, Norwich, Smyrna, Eaton, Morrisville, Munns, Durhamville, Fish Creek, Pennellville, Fulton, Arrowhead and Oswego, to name a few. On the Scranton branch, the train stopped at Hancock, Forest City, Carbondale, Winton, Olyphant, Dickson, Providence, and Scranton, among other towns.

As industry gradually moved out of central and southern New York to more western places, the railroad came into a new means of maintaining itself. It began to serve as a fast, dependable freight service to and from New England, via the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad, thus eliminating delays on freight moving through the clogged New York Harbor gateways. Today this is the railroad's chief source of revenue, for it continues to be a fast, modern line, communicating with the New England area directly from the west, bringing in fresh vegetables and other produce, and in exchange taking New England manufactures for distribution to westerly points.

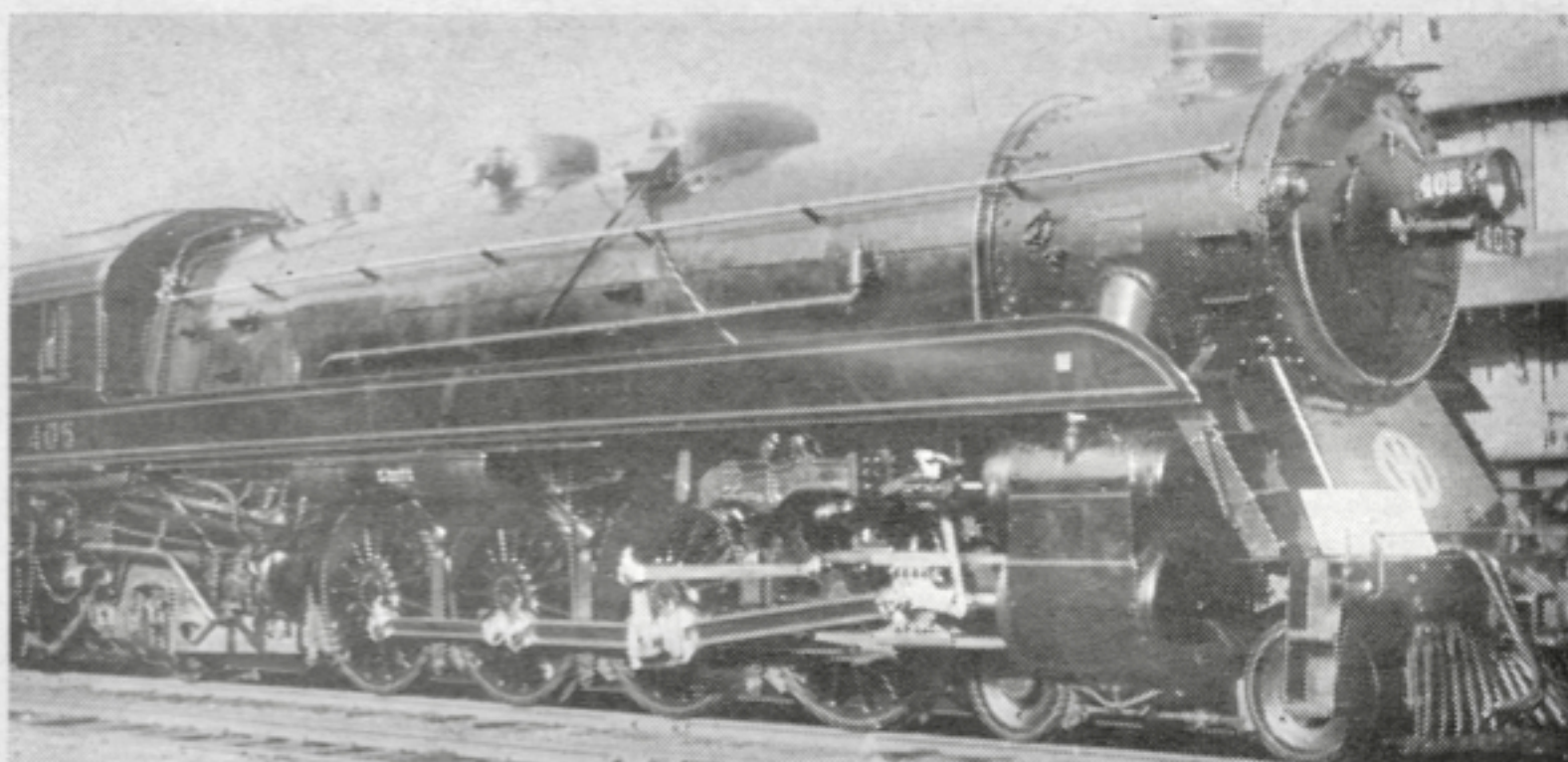
With its growth, the O. & W. has seen a succession of powerful locomotives. Pictured on these pages are everything from bell-stacked 4-4-2's (four guide wheels, four main drive and two trailer) to the huge mountain 4-8-4's, used for hauling long lines of freight over steep grades. The year 1945 heralded a tremendous turn of events for the railroad, for in that year nine great diesel locomotives, all sparkling new, were bought for the

line. Each one of these engines developed 2,700 horsepower and weighed, fully loaded, 458,000 pounds. These mechanical workhorses were turned to on the right of way and soon proved themselves far superior to the old coal-burning locomotives. The company, which had been in receivership since 1937, then decided to completely modernize the line and in 1948, casting aside all the coal-burning engines, bought 28 more diesel-electric locomotives. The line, as it stands today, is completely modernized.

At present, the railroad is mainly a freight line, although the O. & W. provides passenger service during the summer to that section of New York State known as "The Playground of the Empire State." It is a vacation paradise, and providing adequate transportation for vacationists from New York City to this region is an important part of the railroad's ser-

vice. During the vacation season 150,000 passengers are transported an average distance of 100 miles; and on some days equipment for as many as 11,000 passengers is provided. There are numerous camps for children in this region and the O. & W. annually provides special trains to transport more than 6,500 of them safely and conveniently to their destination.

This reporter, who visited the Cadosia freight yard, one of the central yards on the line since it is the first connecting yard on the main line for the Scranton Branch, found it indeed a busy and exciting place. W. F. Capach, agent and operator at the Cadosia office, was the hub around which the wheels of the yard revolved. He has been with the O. & W. since 1919 (this, in railroading terms, makes him almost, but not quite, a newcomer to the line) and has worked nearly every station of the division. In his busy office was



This 4-8-4 mountain-type locomotive was, in its day, the most powerful engine on the O. & W.

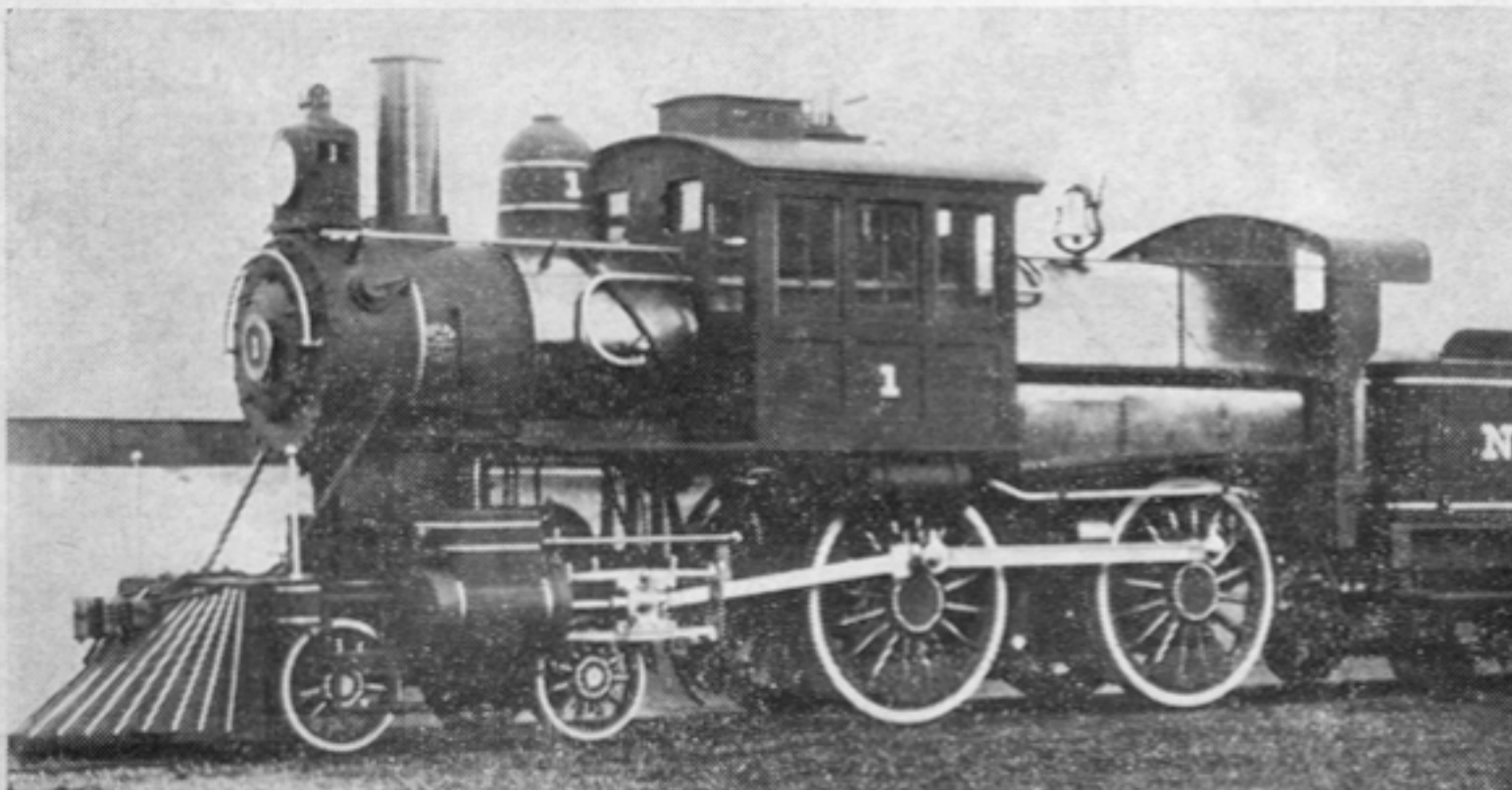


This rare shot shows the West Haverstraw "Depot" in the 1880s. Note the old bell-stacked engine and the latest women's fashions exhibited in the foreground.

a tremendous desk, chock full of almost every kind of equipment available; reams of order bills and receiving bills, three telegraph keys, two telephones and other strange looking pieces of machinery. The telegraph key ticked on and on while he reminisced about the old days of railroading (this, as any railroader knows, means those days when the lines had "steamers" instead of "oilers") and every once in a while Mr. Capach would incline his head toward the key, make a few swift notes on his ever-ready pad, and continue talking. In the room with him was W. H. O'Neill, aged 63, the yardmaster at Cadosia. He has been with the O. & W. since 1906 and has worked out of the Cadosia yard since he was



The 10:30 through-freight rounds the bend at Cadosia freight yard.



The second No. 1, an old humpback steamer, built in 1895 and scrapped by the O. & W. in 1916.

16 years of age. The yard of which he is the master has a capacity of 350 cars, and during the month of August handled a total of 450 cars, most of them gravel and sand for the new highway between Deposit and Hancock.

"Summer," said Mr. O'Neill, "is our biggest time. We handle lots of freight then. It's all done real quiet now, though. Used to be that the yard was full of huffing and chuffing, and smoke and cinders when a through-freight would stop to let off cars. Now it's all quiet . . . no noise."

"I can remember," he continued, "when there were passenger trains coming through here daily. And during the first World War . . . well, there was a troop train through here every hour on the hour. In those days we worked a 12 hour shift, seven days a week, sending those boys through to Bayonne, where they shipped them to Europe.

"Yes, we handled a lot of freight during the second World War, but

no troop trains. This line was strictly freight by then. Sure missed those troop trains, though. Lot of hard work, but it was fun to help those boys through, I'll tell you."

The telegraph key muttered and Mr. Capach announced that the 10:30 through freight was right on time, just coming down the line through Apex.

"We've got about 70 men here dependent on this railroad," said Mr. Capach. "Let's see . . . two yard crews, that makes 35 men; two section gangs of 11 men each; and of course those of us who work here in the office."

"There used to be some excitement here during the second war,"
(Continued on Page 29)

The Mighty O. & W.

(Continued from Page 10)

said Mr. O'Neill. "Remember when they used to run those trains up to Scintilla in Sidney, Bill? Well, they used to run them up there three times a day from Cadosia and Hancock to get the three shifts."

A horn sounded suddenly in the distance, and Mr. O'Neill disappeared on the run. Mr. Capach began to get his bills of lading ready and soon he, too, disappeared. In the yard, the switcher, a small diesel-electric locomotive, headed down the line to a point just around a curve. Suddenly, majestically booming along over a high trestle, came the through freight, a tremendous diesel locomotive drawing an apparently endless train of cars. The huge engine stopped right by the station and unhitched. Then it raced ahead beyond the curve, leaving a tremendous load behind. Two short toots from the switcher, and down the main line they came with four new freight cars to add to the others. The through-freight brakeman signaled the switcher to come on, come on, come on, and with a resounding crash, the cars were united with the long freight train. With a couple of more toots, the switcher was off down the track, the huge diesel had backed into position again, and with a single, long blast, the through-freight was off again. The entire operation took less than five minutes, yet in that time, uncounted thousands of dollars worth of merchandise had been moved into position to get to its destination. As the freight cars drew along faster and faster, Mr. Capach emerged from the station carrying what looked like an oversize lacrosse stick, on which were tied several messages. He calmly took his place beside the tracks, the freight cars whooshing by him, and when the caboos came running around the turn, sure enough, there on the steps was another brakeman. He stuck out his arm, looped it through the curved stick and disappeared in a swirl of dust.

Mr. O'Neill came up out of nowhere with a satisfied look on his face and said, "How's that for speed? My boys are going off now to the asphalt works down the road to pick up a few cars and me, well, I'm off for lunch."

Mr. Capach, who came calmly up from what had looked like sure death, started a few reminiscences himself. He recalled how he had at one time worked at the signal tower

down the line, just before the Cadosia tunnel. The tunnel, it seems, is a long, curved one, and it is impossible for a train approaching it to see if another is coming the other way, and it was one of his jobs to keep two trains from meeting in the middle. "All electrically controlled, now, though. They tore the signal tower down, nothing there but an unused shack. This little thing," pointing to an oblong box on his desk, "does all the work that five men used to do."

During the days of hoop skirts and bustles, of upright collars and foulards, the O. & W. did an immense amount of passenger traffic. However, since 1930, the line has steadily discontinued passenger service which it was losing to lines that ran directly into New York and to bus services, until at present only the summer vacationers are handled. At Middletown, which is the nerve center of the O. & W., are the locomotive and car repair shops. All major repairs are made at this point, while light running repairs are made at shops located at Mayfield Yard, near Scranton and at Norwich. The Middletown shops are modern and completely equipped, and have in addition to the locomotive shops, machine shops, blacksmith shops, woodworking shops, paint shops, and other supporting facilities.

The line maintains two coal piers at Weehawken, N. J., and has 35 acres of lakefront property at Oswego on Lake Ontario to accommodate freight. Freight moves at an average rate of 26 miles per hour over the main line, which is very fast indeed, considering stops for loading and discharging.

But all this—37 locomotives, 541 miles of track, freight yards and stations, brakemen, engineers, yardmasters, operators—is doomed to disappear from the New York scene if the RFC fulfills its threat to foreclose on the locomotives. A line on which hundreds of families are dependent and on which numerous businessmen move their merchandise is liable to become extinct, to disappear into thin air for lack of motive power to move its freight. The mighty O. & W., with its bustling history of serving central and southern New York surely deserves a better fate than this. We hope, and we know our readers hope, that the O. & W., a historic landmark in the Southern Tier, can fight its way out of the terrible plight it is now in. Best of luck to you, New York, Ontario and Western Railway, and we hope you're with us for many more years—to stay.