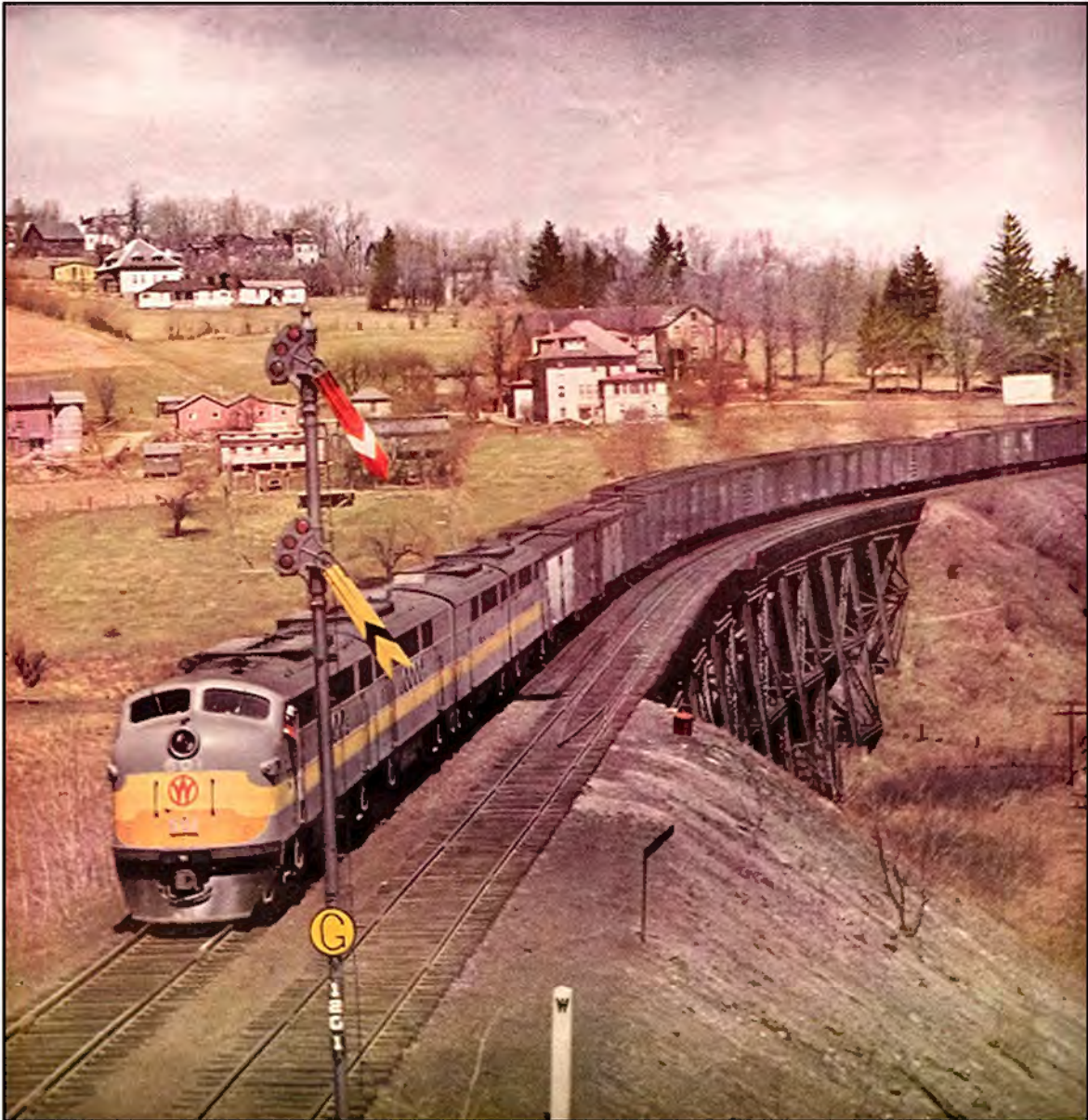


**The Midland And Beyond**  
**Sunday Press, Binghamton, N.Y., March 31, 1957**  
**Contributed By Richard Palmer**



This is a southbound train crossing the North Liberty trestle, about a half-mile above the center of Liberty. The train went over that bridge and then through a deep cut. The photographer is standing on top of the hill where the cut runs through. The photo appeared on the cover of Esso's (Eastern Standard Oil) August 1946 stockholder magazine "Oilways". That edition of "Oilways" had a feature article on the partnership between the Standard Oil Development Corp. and the O&W in testing lubricants for diesel engines. The article was entitled "The Search that Never Ends". Standard Oil Development essentially loaned the O&W the money to purchase EMD FT #601 which served as the test bed for the development of lubricants. The train is hotshot NE-4 which ran from Mayfield to Maybrook. NE-4 did early AM pickups from the LV & DL&W and ran as a time freight to Maybrook with only one stop to pick up and set out cars from the Northern Division at Cadosia.



**Vast O&W Main Yards at Middletown Stand Almost Empty as the Old Railroad Dies** —SUNDAY PRESS PHOTOS BY BOLAN

### Many Unofficial 'Owners' Saddened by the Finale

An old railroad never dies.

Nor does it fade away. It lives on in the hopes and hearts of those who ran it and who loved it.

Take the "Old and Weary," whose obituary was filed away a little more than a week ago in the bulging archives of Uncle Sam's tax department - executed for \$14 million in unpaid taxes, a victim of an advancing civilization after 86 years of usefulness.

There's Hank Kortright, a 72-year-old bantam rooster engineer in high black shoes - cantankerous outside and all heart and eating tobacco inside. It is his railroad - the New York, Ontario and Western.

When Jerry Handte, Binghamton Press reporter, plodded through the Norwich yards that funeral afternoon after an eight-hour, 147-mile ride from Middletown to Norwich, Hank called out:

"We're going to keep her going!"

By "we," he meant, the easy Fred Schild, a cigar-smoking flagman - Thomas Carmody, his fireman, and on through 1,100 employees.



**HIGH TO THE 'HOG'**—Engineer, or "hog" in railroad slang, Hank Kortright reaches down to take train orders from Middletown Trainmaster Wilbur Wilson at Mountain Dale, where No. 9 had to wait for a southbound train to pass before she could highball into a single track stretch. Orders list times and places for meeting other trains.



**FLAGMAN'S FANCY**—Fred A. Schild, No. 9's flagman, sits at the desk in the rear of the caboose with a stogie to help his memory travel over an O&W career stretching back to 1911. At the desk, with its glass lantern, conductor and flagman keep records on all freight and cars handled by the train.

The woman who smiled as she stooped to pick up a newspaper tossed out of the caboose at Fish's Eddy; the little girl at Walton who waved - it is their railroad, too.

A railroad belongs to those who have heard the steam hissing from the valves of a sooty eight-wheeler. It belongs to those who love it.

How do you stop a railroad? How do you stop people from loving her?

Railroads are magic because they go somewhere in spectacularly visible and audible fashion. The businesslike diesels don't match the old steamers, with their connecting rods pumping and their whistles screaming.

But the sickening slam of cars taking up the slack in a bone shaking stop is there, and the braying honk of the horn. Railroads also are magic because they are monumental, old. The O&W - the "Old and Weary" was like all railroads in many ways.

The station at Middletown, operating headquarters, is a big oblong of soot-blackened brick. The diesel shops are bigger. The fragile-looking high trestles, the dark tunnels exploded out of Catskill granite, they were meant for permanence.

Streamlined automobiles are designed to be old fashioned before the payments are completed. Airliners ride the air so high and fast they pass unnoticed. These are toys beside the ponderous size and noise of railroading.

That is why the reporter getting aboard the caboose of No. 9 in the nearly empty Middletown yards could not sense the end of the New York, Ontario & Western.

Who would break up a diesel locomotive for scrap? Who would pick up 550 miles of track from the Atlantic through the middle of the state to Lake Ontario? "We'll need extra cars coming back, for the mourners," said Fred Schild, the flagman. "Railroaders AND customers."

It was the first reference aboard No. 9 to the shutdown, only three days off.

"We won't need them either," Wilbur (Wilby) Wilson, the Middletown trainmaster, riding No. 9 to Cadonia, corrected him. "If anyone rides back with you, they'll have a long walk home."

Cabooses are bigger inside than they seem from the outside. This one had a pot-bellied coal stove in the center, a conductor's desk at the rear (actually a folding wooden table top) benches cushioned with worn black leather on either side, a gasoline lantern on the desk. It had a clothes closet and wire coat hangers. Up above was the first Vista Dome, that raised gimmick you see from the outside, with windows on all sides.

Leon Tompkins, the conductor and senior member of the crew with service from 1908, and Ed Griswold, the rear brakeman, who joined the O&W 10 years later, hauled themselves up as though getting into upper berths, onto two window benches in the cupola. "You can see your train from up there," explained Fred. "Spot trouble."

Later, the reporter was shown the emergency air brake control in the cupola, the only means the caboose crew has of signaling the engineer.

The O&W, then the New York and Oswego Midland, was founded in 1866 with the idea that Oswego would become a great commercial port for Great Lakes steamers.

Leaving Weehawken and probing for the most direct route to Oswego about 240 miles, the builders happened to hit upon the lovely, mountainous country for which the road is famous.

Tuesday, March 26, was a sullen, gray day. The earth was still barren, brown and old. The beauty had to be seen by imagination, how it looked to the summer resort people, the Bronxites on the way to Livingston Manor for the July 4 weekend, before passenger service folded in 1953.

"This railroad made its money on coal, milk and passengers. Now they're all gone," Wilbur Wilson mused. "And I'm too young (55) for a pension, and too old to get another job. This used to be milk train, No. 9," Fred said.

The train changed to a stop, throwing the reporter off balance into a bench. He was told there 10 inches of slack in each coupling. The longer the train, the worse the accumulated jolt in the caboose. This train had five cars, four of them empty. More jolt and the O&W might not be in receivership. "I've run up here on Nine with 150, 200 cars, extra engines behind," Ed Griswold said.

The train waited where the line switched from a double track to a single track, waiting for a southbound freight to pass. It was NE-4, coming from Lehigh Valley and DL&W connections to the west, bound for Maybrook, near the Hudson River, a link with the New York, New Haven & Hartford.

Someone counted 122 cars. Most of them were empties, The O&W under an embargo, was permitted to take no new freight orders. The trains were picking up cars, taking O&W rolling stock home for the last time, taking the cars of other railroads to junction points for return.

"That used to be a big train, maybe 300. This was a bridge railroad, hauling freight from one line to another," said Leon Tompkins. "Trouble with that, we pay rental for cars owned by other roads. The trick is to get rid of the empties before midnight, otherwise you pay another day's rent, like a hotel."

Hank Kortright seemed to have little to do but sound his horn for crossing's. His controls were simple, and their use explained by a colored diagram in front of him.

"Steam was more fun. There was a lot of clatter and row to it, and you could let her out when you had a chance. These things run themselves. And they've got a governor on the damn things," Hank said.

"Tom don't think steam was better, I'd a had him busy with that long handled shovel, moving coal."

"Oh, they were dirty, the steamers," Tom Carmody said. "Everyone was black with cinders and soot. Even the passengers, the summer trade. They'd insist on opening the windows in the tunnels."

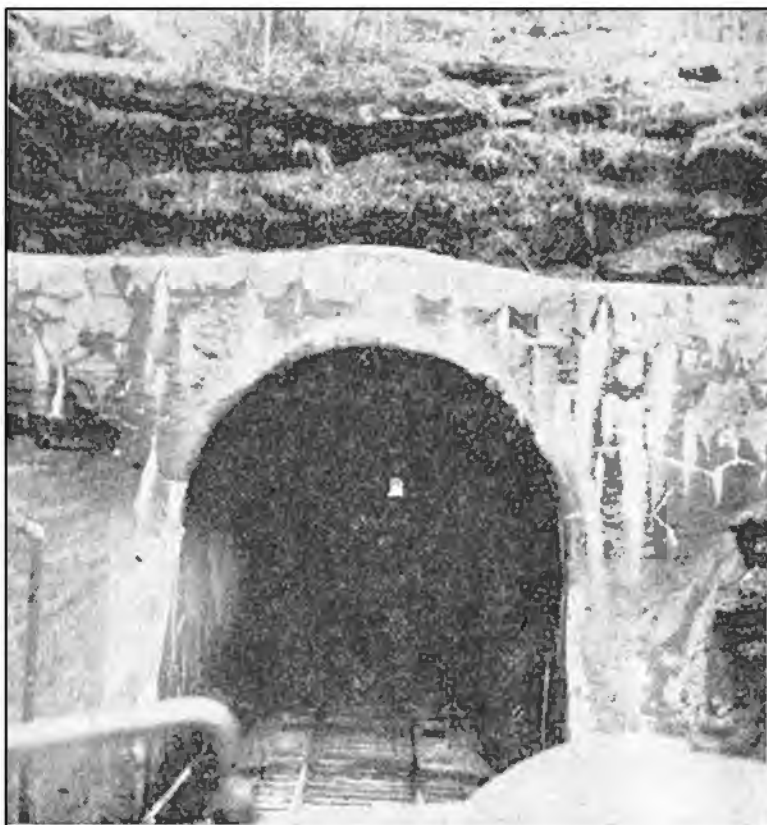
Later he took the reporter back inside and a diesel engine became something of beauty, compact, like a submarine, and scary with cabinets painted "Danger. 600 volts."

Ferndale, Liberty, Livingston Manor, the bonscht belt off season. Big hotels. East Branch, Fish's Eddy, Cadosia in the trout country. Small lumber yards, a stone quarry, feed mills, no big industry.

Then to Walton. "This used to be a big point before Crawford's mill burned. Feed, limestone, sand. Fifty or 60 cars in the yards, loaded all the time," said Tom Natoli, the Norwich trainmaster, who had come on at Cadosia.

From Walton into Norwich there was practically no business, hardly any people visible, rolling hills, scenery. The train came into Norwich toward dusk, with 16 cars, 15 empty. "We're going to keep her going fellow. Come back for another ride," said Hank.

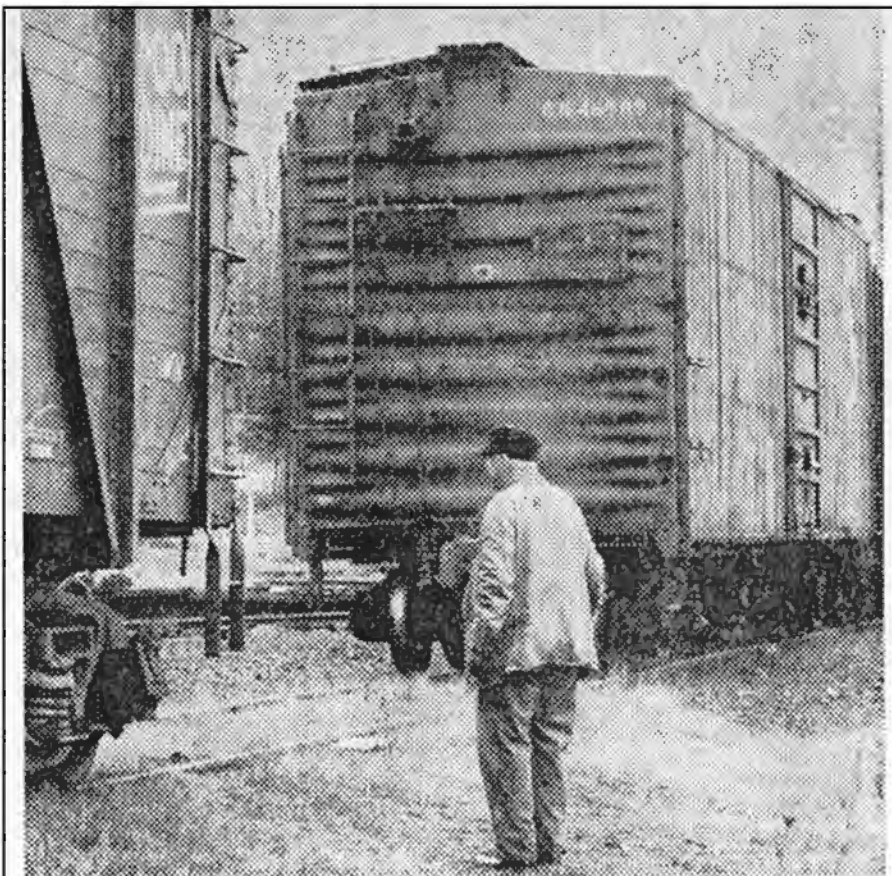
The reporter recalled a meeting before the run with Robert H. McGraw, a big, bluff Irishman saddened by a job he was asked to do too late.



**GOING UNDER**—No. 9 plunges into the Northfield tunnel between Sidney Center and Walton, not far from a spectacularly high trestle. Terrain problems such as steep grades have consistently boosted O&W costs. Four steam engines to a train was not unusual before the switch to diesels in 1948.



**'ROOKIE'**—Thomas Carmody, "baby" of No. 9's crew because he has been with the road "only" since 1921, checks submarine-like interior of the diesel.



**PICKUP MAN** — Leon Tompkins, a freight conductor who has worked for the O&W since 1908, superintends the coupling as Hank Kortright backs his diesel, extreme right, to pick up two empties at Sidney, where No. 9 also dropped an empty coal gondola for the connecting Delaware & Hudson RR.

“Too little and too late,” he had said of his appointment by the receivers as general manager in charge of last-minute miracles.

“Maybe it’s a grace in disguise. Maybe there’s a lesson in it for all railroads,” he said.

“Your passengers have gone, your milk has gone, your less-than-carload freight has gone between the trucks and the airplanes.”

Industrial development with communities zoning adequate space for industry before industry comes looking for space can save railroads, the retired New York Central western district general manager said.

“No industries mean no railroad, and communities must realize, no railroads mean no industries,” he said. “That’s why the communities are stupid to let railroads go.”

Mr. McGraw said that “without criticizing anyone” he wanted to say that little or nothing had been done since the O&W went bankrupt in 1937 to bring new business to replace lost business.

“Of course no one wants to do business with a bankrupt,” he acknowledged.

He cited new General Electric and Niagara Mohawk Power Co. plants at New Hartford, on the O&W Rome-Utica spur, as a tragic example of lost business.

“The plants give their business to another road. Yet most plants today

want two railroads. And, in the smaller communities, industry wants the space available, including parking space.”

Planning could have brought industries to the pastoral O&W main line, Mr. McGraw thought. “Industrial people have lost their confidence in the O&W,” said the husky executive, who came on the job last Feb. 9.

The O&W once had 3,000 employees, it had 1,100 when it folded. Fortunately, an estimated third have reached retirement age, and another third is close. Since 1937, few men have been hired. The crew of No. 9 was typical, one man with the road since 1908, three since 1911,

another since 1918, another since 1921.

Railroaders with 30 years service are entitled to full pensions at 65, partial pensions earlier.

Another casualty of the collapse is the failure of small industries dependent on the road. Other railroads have been given permission to run over portions of the O&W right-of-way. O&W men have territorial rights to work there. But it won't be the same. "This may be the largest railroad ever to close down," said Mr. McGraw.

The bulletin posted on the O&W freight house in Utica appeared no more conspicuous, no more impressive than any others posted there. Yet it marked a final page in a chapter of railroad history that left its mark in the entire county area. It was terse, it was curt.

It read:

"The railroad will cease operation at 11:59 p.m., Friday, March 29, 1957." It was signed T. B. Girard, assistant general manager.

But the railroad fever gets into the bloodstream of those who have lived in it for almost as long as they can remember. It takes more than the medication of retirement to get rid of it. Perhaps, for some, it will mean taking it to the grave.

At any rate, those who have contracted it have learned to live with it. It becomes a personal thing, like an omni-present companion, faithful and dependable to the end.

Railroad men and their railroad become like something Lindbergh had in mind when he described his Atlantic trip in the Spirit of St. Louis.



R. H. McGRAW  
O&W's general manager



STATION IS MIDDLETOWN—Operations offices of the "Old and Weary" in the Middletown depot were busy last week, but the rest was silence. No conductor has called "Station is Middletown" since the summer of 1953. Caboose of No. 9, northbound freight to Nprwich, is at right.



OLD, BUT NOT WEARY—Hank Kortright, peppery 72-year-old O&W engineer, has 2,700 horses under his hand as he takes the controls of the diesel engine of No. 9. "We're gonna keep going," he said of the bankrupt road last week. He has been with the railroad for half of its 86 years.

Once possessed with the railroad fever, then, a railroad man talks of it like a treasured companion. Just as a man may speak of "my friend," a professional railroad man may speak of "my railroad."

Thus, only a few short hours before the O&W was to write "finis" to its service of almost 90 years, it was only natural that Leo Mengel would be found sitting in his office wondering about what was going to happen next.

He had been an O&W employee since 1915 and freight agent for the railroad since 1950. He sat in his office in Division St. talking about "my railroad."

His case was typical of many. But this was the beginning of the end. He had just received instructions to close up the place and leave the keys. Nothing else. No word about the future or the hope, if any, for the valiant railroad. He could visualize the quiet of a train now out of sight; the tracks taking on the somber appearance of abandoned skeletons of steel and wood. Only now it would be this way for a much longer time than until "the next freight" was due.

And, it would be for the entire 541 winding miles of track between Weehawken, N. J. and the Port of Oswego.



**HIGH AND WIDE**—Photographer John Bolas leaned out of the cab of No. 9, on its next-to-last run north to shoot this long, high single track trestle on the O&W at Sidney Center. Bridges and tunnels outnumber cities on the Middletown-Norwich run.