

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

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## **Railroads In Rochester's History**

By BLAKE MCKELVEY

Few aspects of Rochester's history have been more consistently neglected in recent years than the contributions of its railroads. Almost a century has elapsed since Rochester was an important junction, and although the steam roads long continued (and still continue) to render vital services to the community, their role has in recent decades been obscured by the attention given to the mounting traffic on its highways and airways. Yet the city's economic growth would have been seriously stunted had it not been for the railroads several of its enterprising citizens helped to build in the 1830's and after. Moreover Rochester's character was so significantly influenced by the particular services rendered by its railroads that a fuller appreciation of their role is in order.

### **The Pioneer Railroads**

Founded as a milltown at the Genesee falls in 1812 and transformed into a bustling city by the building of the Erie Canal a decade later, Rochester quite properly gave its first allegiance during the next half century to the canal. To the millers, merchants, and boat builders of the Flour City, the canal was the principal artery of trade, and for a decade after their arrival the only functions assigned to or expected from

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the railroads were the supply of speedier stage service and useful feeder lines. Few Rochesterians, even among the promoters of the first railroads, sensed their larger potentialities. Thus Elisha Johnson, though responsible for the construction of two pioneer railroads, devoted more time and effort to the building of the Genesee Valley Canal, an ill-fated project that caused his downfall.

Yet if Rochester, like Johnson, was slow to grasp the relative importance of railroads and canals, as an interior city it made considerable headway in the development of rail lines before the Civil War. Each of the several projects its citizens backed had a specific objective that promised to improve the city's position, and the priorities were judiciously weighed.

Thus the first local railroad was a horsecar line linking the canal at Rochester with its lake port. Elisha Johnson, Josiah Bissell, and a few other eastsiders organized the Rochester Canal & Railway Company in 1825 shortly after the official dedication of the Erie Canal that fall. The community was too absorbed by the early impact of the canal to give the rail line or the lake port much attention for several years; early in 1831, however, its representative at Albany pressed a bill through the legislature incorporating such a road with a capitalization of \$30,000. By September 1832 the three-mile rail line on the east bank was completed linking Rochester and Carthage. Abraham M. Schermerhorn, treasurer of the road and destined five years later to become Rochester's third mayor, rode with several other gentlemen and a small band of musicians in the first carriage drawn over its rails by two horses hitched in tandem. Four open coaches with canvas flaps for protection in inclement weather and several flat cars for freight comprised the road's equipment and supplied a convenient link between the mushrooming city and its lake port below the lower falls. Unfortunately the fare of a shilling each way and the modest freight charges failed to return a profit, and although its backers were still sufficiently

hopeful in 1833 to block a scheme to build a rival line along the west bank to Charlotte at the river's mouth, they permitted their road to fall into disrepair and finally liquidated the venture in 1839.

Another horse car line constructed in the late twenties from Canandaigua to the Erie Canal had likewise failed, but news of the successful operation of a steam driven train on the partially constructed Baltimore & Ohio prompted Elisha Johnson again to take the lead in a move for a steam road to Batavia. The charter granted to the Rochester & Tonawanda Railroad Company in April 1832 was only one of several secured for Rochester area companies that year; the other lines projected from Rochester to Dansville, Rochester to Lockport, and Rochester to Wheatland failed to attract the necessary financial backing. Apparently the challenge of drawing Batavia into the Rochester orbit before a projected Buffalo railroad should reach that town was sufficient to elicit stock subscriptions on August 14, 1833, for the entire issue of \$500,000 from 96 residents of Rochester and nearby towns. The progressive construction of this road during the next three years forestalled efforts to promote a rival line from Buffalo eastward through Genesee, Livingston, and Ontario counties to reach Canandaigua and Geneva by a route that would have bypassed Rochester. Daniel Evans of Batavia was elected president of the Rochester & Tonawanda Railroad and several of his fellow townsmen were drawn into the enterprise of which Jonathan Child of Rochester became vice-president, A. M. Schermerhorn treasurer and Frederick W. Whittlesey, secretary.

Elisha Johnson, soon to be chosen Rochester's fifth mayor, designed and built the 43-mile line from Rochester through Batavia to Attica at the headwaters of the Alleghany River. The easy grade westward from Rochester into and through the Tonawanda Valley permitted its economical construction. Sturdy posts were driven into the earth in two rows at ten-foot

intervals to support cross ties on which heavy timbers were laid lengthwise to provide the base for iron strip rails that were held in place by seven-inch spikes. The framework was then strengthened by a dirt fill. By May 1837, when the first engine arrived by canal boat from the east, the 32-mile stretch of tract to Batavia was ready for use, and a gala celebration inaugurated service on the new road.

A throng of citizens assembled on May 11 at the terminal west of the U.S. Hotel (later the first home of the University of Rochester) on Buffalo (West Main) Street to cheer the departure of the first train. A party of favored citizens boarded the three cars built at the company's shop in Rochester, and the engine, "panting like an impatient war-horse," as a local reporter described the scene, sped forward at a given signal "like a thing of life." "In 40 minutes we were in Churchville" where, he added, "the inhabitants gave us a cordial welcome." Other crowds were out to welcome them at Bergen, Byron, and Batavia where a committee of citizens and officials escorted the travelers to the Eagle Hotel for a sumptuous dinner. After a few hours of festivities in Batavia the company again boarded the train for a triumphant return to Rochester.

Even before the opening of the Tonawanda line a second steam railroad, the Auburn & Rochester, was under construction. Organized in the early thirties and finally chartered in April 1836, it was designed to link the old Ontario County towns of Canandaigua and Geneva to the rising city of Rochester. Most of the backing for this new line came from these towns as their leaders sought to recoup the prestige lost when the canal bypassed them to the north. The directors chose Henry B. Gibson of Canandaigua as president and James Seymour, formerly of that town but then a banker in Rochester, as vice-president. Despite delays occasioned by the onset of the depression, construction progressed in the late thirties and reached Canandaigua in September 1840, Geneva by the next July, Seneca

Falls in August, Waterloo in September, and entered Auburn 78 miles to the east on November 4, 1841.

The first engine, again brought by canal boat from the east and named "The Young Lion" (after Rochester's original canal packet now long since retired), steamed from Rochester to Canandaigua on September 10, 1840. The three daily trains operated the next year gradually extended their runs eastward to Auburn thus completing the last link in a loose chain of independent railroads stretching eastward to Albany and westward to Buffalo.

The links were not as yet closely joined, however. Thus the depot of the Auburn & Rochester was erected on Mill Street at the brink of the Main Falls several blocks distant from the terminal of the Tonawanda on Buffalo Street. That gap was not finally closed until 1844 when the Tonawanda built a spur to join the tracks of the Auburn at Mill Street. From that date trains from Buffalo, after switching to the Tonawanda at Attica, could proceed eastward across the Genesee to swing around the northeastern section of the city before crossing to the south of the canal at Pittsford, and by switching again at Auburn, Syracuse, Utica, and Schenectady could reach Albany in one continuous trip of 25 hours. And although the independent companies did not immediately coordinate their schedules they successfully captured the passenger trade of the old cross-state stage and packet lines and diverted the stages to north-south feeder routes.

That the pioneer railroads were in large part stage lines operated by steam and running on rails was clearly evident in most of their charters. Although only one charter, that of the Schenectady & Utica, forbade the transport of any freight, all the others required the companies to turn over a portion of their freight revenue during the canal season to the state. The restraints against competition with the canal were so strong that merchants in Canandaigua had to petition the Auburn & Rochester

in December 1841 to persuade it to send at least one freight train a week to pick up shipments along its route, which was of course well south of the canal. Most of the companies quickly negotiated contracts to carry mail and constructed mail cars to facilitate that service, but the opposition of rival stage drivers, who often delayed the delivery of the mail until after a scheduled departure, proved a serious annoyance for several years.

The opening of rail connections to Albany in 1842 enabled the Auburn & Rochester to bring in six elegant new coaches each fitted to seat 50 passengers and priced at \$1,700. Laudatory descriptions of these coaches, each equipped with separate lavatories for men and women, prompted the other roads to improve their accommodations. Sturdier engines were soon required, and the additional weight quickly revealed the inadequacy of the track. The original strip rails (which occasionally broke loose when friction from a heavy engine heated the top side, contracting it sufficiently to cause it to spring loose from its spikes and to curl up, snagging or derailing the cars) had to be replaced by heavier rails. Both the Tonawanda and the Auburn & Rochester replaced their strip iron rails in 1848 with the new T-bar rails laid on frequent cross ties and won praise from Hunt's Merchants Magazine for the superior quality of their road beds. Despite interruptions for these improvements both roads enjoyed increased patronage, carrying 148,500 and 209,300 passengers respectively that year and recording profits of \$57,000 and \$96,000 from their freight shipments, sufficient with the larger passenger revenue to pay 8 per cent dividends to their stockholders.

Despite the persistent pressure of local tavern keepers, especially at Rochester and Syracuse, for a continued interruption of the cross-state trips at these points, the mounting demand for through service was increasingly apparent. The consolidation of the Auburn & Rochester and the Auburn & Syracuse in July 1850, and of the Tonawanda and the Buffalo & Attica a

few months later, reduced the number of cross-state roads from seven to five and speeded traffic. An urgent need to effect all possible efficiencies and economies was presented in the early fifties by the steady progress of a new competitor, the New York & Erie, reaching west from New York City through the southern tier of counties to Lake Erie. As its tracks approached Dunkirk south of Buffalo in 1851, threatening to cut deeply into the latter city's trade monopoly, an old Rochester project to build south through Avon and Geneseo to Dansville was revived with the hope of forming a link with the Erie.

Two additional railroad projects posed serious threats to the pioneer lines. One for a road from Rochester to Syracuse paralleling the canal, and another for a road from Rochester to Lockport and on to Niagara Falls had been blocked for a number of years by the backers of the earlier railroads assisted by the more numerous canal interests. In the early fifties, however, these projects acquired a new urgency as useful links in the upstate chain to buttress its hold on the lake trade. The consolidated Rochester, Auburn & Syracuse received a franchise to build a direct line along the canal in 1851, and promoters of the Rochester & Lockport finally reached an accord with Joseph Field of Rochester, president of the Buffalo & Rochester, and Dean Richmond of Batavia, vice-president, who in 1853 took the lead in negotiating the consolidation of the ten short roads of upstate New York into the New York Central. Richmond, who became president of the consolidated company, pressed construction that year both of the Lockport branch and of the direct line to Syracuse. He hastened to absorb a newly built short line from Rochester to its lake port at Charlotte, and he launched an improvement program designed to double-track the entire length of the main line within the next seven years.

### **Rochester, a Key Railroad Junction**

Much to the surprise of many Rochesterians, the consolida-

tion of the New York Central transformed the city from a leisurely canal port into a bustling railroad junction. Although Joseph Field, a former Rochester mayor and its first representative on the Central's board of directors, resigned after three years to devote full time to a Gas Light Company, former Mayor Jacob Gould, a local shoe manufacturer and banker, took his place. To demonstrate his confidence in Rochester, Richmond had erected a fine new station on Mill Street at the brink of the falls in 1854 and provided additional facilities as needed to maintain it as the principal junction point on the entire system throughout the next decade. The freight yard near Brown Square became a busy switching place attracting new enterprise and boosting the price of adjoining lots to unprecedented heights.

No one could deny the increased activity brought by the New York Central in the middle fifties, yet many citizens feared the long range effects of monopoly control over the city's trade. One way to avoid that situation was to speed construction of the Genesee Valley Railway and thus open a competing route by way of the Erie Railroad. The slow response of local investors, when the stock was first offered for sale in 1851, prompted a drive to persuade the city to put public funds into this project and, after a favorable response by the voters, the council agreed to invest \$300,000 in this venture. Unfortunately the city, which paid in full for its stock, contributing more than half the cash invested, received the power to name only four of the twelve trustees, and several of the others chosen were in fact friends of the New York Central and wished to make it a tributary to that system.

An early decision was necessary since the track gauge on the Erie differed somewhat from that on the Central and if adopted on the Genesee Valley would effectively exclude the Central's cars from its route. That decision was made and the construction of the road was commenced, permitting the operation of the



first trains between Rochester and Avon under a leasing agreement with the Erie in September 1854.

With a measure of competition established, Rochester could give more attention to improvements in service. Six special sleeping cars appeared on the Central in 1858 and a smoking car the next year. A severe snow storm in February 1856 had blocked the tracks around Brockport, defying the company's efforts to clear them with a V-plow; a year later, however, it was ready with an improved plow that scooped the snow onto a movable chain and carried it off to the side. The installation of improved stoves at the front and rear of each car provided better warmth in winter, and the addition of a restaurant or dining car in 1860 further contributed to the comfort of passengers. The introduction of coal burning engines, to replace the old wood burners in 1859, greatly reduced the hazard to adjoining properties from flaming sparks and considerably improved the speed and efficiency of the new engines.

As the work of double-tracking the main line progressed, both east and west of Rochester, its ability to function as an important junction improved. This was fortunate as the number of trains leaving the city mounted to 60 a day by 1860. A major reason for the increased activity that year was the final completion of the Great Western Railroad across the Province of Ontario between Queenstown on the Niagara and Windsor on the Detroit River. This route made the Rochester, Lockport, & Suspension Bridge line a major east-west channel with 30 trains crossing daily over the bridge hailed at its dedication in 1855 as the longest suspension bridge in the world. The opening of this new trade route produced a reduction in the rates on grain shipments from the west, but millers who rejoiced over the restoration of competition there soon had cause to complain when they discovered that the freight charges on flour shipped from Chicago to New York were less than they had to pay from Rochester.

Rochesterians who had endeavored to reduce the threat of monopoly practices by promoting the construction of a link to the competing New York & Erie Railroad saw that hope vanish with the announcement that the Central and the Erie had reached an agreement in 1858 ending their rate war. Although that agreement soon broke down in practice, the Common Council unanimously adopted a petition requesting the legislature to pass a law "to compel the railroads of the state to transport the property of our own citizens . . . on the same terms they charge the people of the eastern and western states." The concept of public regulation was not new, as the state had required the railroads to pay an equivalent of the canal tolls until 1851 in order to protect its investment in that artery, and that requirement had been abandoned only in response to the popular desire for cheaper railroad service. But no agency to enforce equal rates had as yet been perfected, and many shippers pinned their hopes for relief on the enlargement of the canal which was finally completed in 1862.

The competitive control expected from the canal in the late fifties recalls a relationship between its shipments and those on the railroads that was destined to disappear within the next decade. Thus the Central and the Erie, which together had carried barely a million tons of freight in 1853, less than a fourth that of the New York State canals, had more than doubled their loads by 1860 while the canal trade's growth was minimal. In the next decade, although the canal increased its tonnage a third as a result of expanded facilities and mounting demands, the two railroads quadrupled their shipments, overshadowing the canal in the weight and volume of their deliveries as well as in the value carried and the revenues paid. This rapid expansion of their shipments was destined to continue and to produce another four-fold growth in the next two decades, while the canal trade, suffering a modest slump, lost the capacity to exercise any influence over railroad rates, forcing the public

to seek other forms of control.

These dramatic state-wide statistical trends supply the background for the equally startling shift from the canal to the railroads in Rochester's commercial experience. Thus while the local canal shipment bounded to a new high in value in 1865, partly as a result of war-time demands and the improved canal facilities, the tonnage had already started a long decline from the peak figure of 118,609 reached two years before. In toll collections Rochester dropped from sixth to twenty-second place during the decade following the war, and Freeman Clarke argued before the constitutional convention in behalf of state aid for railroads instead of further outlays for the canal. Most of the city's new industries were seeking railroad sidings and, after securing them, demanded freight rates proportionate to those granted their competitors in the east and the west.

The railroads brought other troublesome problems. A brakeman's strike for \$1 a day in June 1857 was quickly settled but led a week later to a second stoppage by the engineers and firemen—a foretaste of labor-management difficulties in the years ahead. The increased number of trains and their accelerated speed resulted in numerous minor accidents and several serious collisions. The engineers learned to speed up rather than slow down for a cow on the tracks in order to bounce it off rather than suffer a derailment, as a reminiscent veteran William Mullen later recalled; drivers approaching a railroad crossing had to learn to watch for the trains, they also had to know how to hold their horses in case one came steaming by. Even the busy State Street crossing remained ungarded for many years; with a dozen or more fatalities occurring annually in the Rochester area in the fifties, other crossings more distant from the station were so hazardous that settlement beyond the tracks was discouraged. It was not until 1872 that the Common Council finally required the companies to station a flagman at every street crossing.

But of course the increased convenience of railroad shipments overshadowed all their handicaps. The Central remained Rochester's chief carrier, but the Civil War with its heavy demand for shipments of food and supplies as well as troops to the front lines in Maryland and Virginia had increased traffic over the Genesee Valley line to Avon and southeast over the Erie. That line, which crossed the river a short distance above the city, came in on the west bank to a freight house on Exchange Street, and the company did not build its station at Court Street until 1887.

One service Rochester desired from its southern railroad was the delivery of a plentiful supply of coal. But unfortunately neither the Genesee Valley nor the Erie to which it was linked directly tapped the coal fields. The Erie had a connection with a coal road, the Delaware & Binghamton, but it was under the control of mining companies that regularly boosted coal prices every winter. In several cities faced with the same problem, business groups joined forces to acquire a coal mine in Pennsylvania to supply the local market. Yet when Rochester explored that possibility the greater need for a rail line to the coal fields became apparent. Agitation for such a road commenced in 1865 and led to the organization four years later of the State Line Railroad. Its plan to head southwest through LeRoy, Warsaw, and Salamanca to tap the coal and oil fields of western Pennsylvania enlisted support from these and other villages but left the major burden to Rochester, and when local capitalists failed to rally in sufficient numbers the Common Council voted in 1872 to bond the city and invest \$600,000 in the enterprise.

The election of Isaac Butts of Rochester as president and the naming of a half dozen other Rochester men as directors assured local control provided sufficient funds could be raised to complete the road; unfortunately the competing claims of rival projects checked its progress. The Genesee Valley Railroad interests, who had extended their line to Mt. Morris, backed

another railroad from Mt. Morris to Nunda, which would tap the Erie branch through Allegany and Steuben Counties and expand Rochester's influence through the upper Genesee region. As that enterprise sought to counter Buffalo's encroachments to the south, another venture, the Lake Shore Railroad, projected to run from Niagara Falls eastward through Charlotte to Oswego, promised to make Rochester the center of the fertile lake-shore towns and to offer competition to the Central's control of the lake trade at both Oswego and Charlotte.

A resurgent desire to take advantage of all opportunities prompted the Common Council to dispatch an appeal to the legislature in 1872 for authority to issue \$1,000,000 in bonds to back worthy railroad ventures. On its passage, \$600,000 was pledged to the State Line Railroad, and construction was pressed with such vigor that the first section was completed to LeRoy and opened by an excursion to that village in October 1874. The city's action in subscribing \$250,000 to the Lake Shore Railroad had likewise spurred construction, and the first train ran from Charlotte to Oswego on January 1, 1875. These expenditures helped to sustain Rochester during the first years of the depression in the mid-seventies, but the deepening grip of that calamity discouraged private subscriptions for stock and halted further railroad construction.

A series of inter-city controversies and bitter law suits further complicated the railroad picture. The spirited but restrained rivalries of the early years of the Central and the Erie had come to an end with the death of Dean Richmond in 1866 and the rise of William H. Vanderbilt to full control of the Central a year later. Vanderbilt, who had built the Hudson River Railroad from New York to Albany in the early 50's, successfully obstructed his rivals Jay Gould and Jim Fisk, who had now captured control of the Erie, from taking over the Albany & Susquehanna Railroad in addition. Its acquisition would have given the Erie a strangle hold over the Central, as well as over

the Hudson River line, and although many in Rochester wished to see the rise of a real competitor of the Central, Judge E. Darwin Smith of Rochester in an epochal decision late in 1870 invalidated the stock deal manipulated by Gould and Fisk in their effort to seize the Susquehanna road.

That victory for Vanderbilt in the east, coupled with his success in merging the Central with his Hudson River line in 1869, sharpened the conflict between the Erie and the Central in western New York. The Erie renewed and strengthened its earlier lease on the Genesee Valley Railroad in 1871 yet failed to head off the formation of the competing Rochester & State Line Railroad. But in 1878, when Vanderbilt sought to gain control of that road by forcing the city and subscribing towns to convert their bonds into stock and second mortgage bonds, the city moved to determine whether all outstanding stock had been fully paid for, an action that prompted Vanderbilt's withdrawal and sent the road into bankruptcy.

The city's difficulties with Vanderbilt, which began in 1874, were destined to continue for many years. The steady growth of traffic on the New York Central had so jammed the small freight yard adjoining Brown Square that larger facilities were required. A new site was chosen just beyond the eastern edge of the city, and construction was well under way when the city fathers determined, in 1874, to extend the city limits. As the area of the city was more than doubled at this time, the incidental fact that the new freight yard was included, subjecting it to taxation by the city, may or may not have been considered, but Vanderbilt, in any event, took it as a sign of hostility and proceeded to pull the repair shops out of Rochester altogether. The city's status as a major railroad center was further weakened when the round trips, previously scheduled from Rochester, were shifted to the Syracuse and Buffalo offices. Of 125 trainmen formerly resident in Rochester, only a fifth remained at the end of the year.

Both civic and business leaders endeavored without success to restore good relations with the railroad king. The council even proposed at one point to exempt the roundhouse from taxes if Vanderbilt would resume its full use, but no reply was received. The real difficulty was more serious in nature, for the great number of fatal accidents at grade crossings in Rochester had produced a situation that required drastic action. The installation of gates and guards at the principal streets did not solve the problem, while the council's efforts to regulate the speed of trains within the city proved ineffective. A suggestion that the tracks be elevated, first proposed in 1876, was sharply debated for several years. Finally a committee was appointed by the legislature with power to negotiate a suitable arrangement.

Vanderbilt offered to elevate the tracks provided the city would free the railroad of taxes for ten years, but this the council refused to do. After trying vainly to persuade the city at least to close a few streets in order to save him the cost of some culverts, Vanderbuilt left for a vacation in Europe. Since the elevation of the tracks would require the construction of a new station, which could most easily be erected on the high ground east of the river, that possibility had immediately divided the city into two camps. Most of the established business interests favored the old site, but some whose lands were east of the river urged the claims of that rapidly growing section. On his return to America, Vanderbilt took advantage of the local disagreement to press ahead with his own program, and after some hesitation the committee signed an agreement approving the project. The elevated tracks were first placed in use on October 9, 1882, a year before the new east-side station was completed.

The grade-crossing controversy opened broader considerations of the city's internal welfare—as distinguished from its trade facilities—altering the popular attitude toward new railroads. Rochester had offered the Lake Shore Railroad \$300,000 to build into the city in 1872, but when that road's successor, the Rome,

Watertown & Ogdensburg, tried finally to extend its line from Charlotte into Rochester, protests appeared from all sides. An intense battle was waged to prevent the railroad from crossing St. Paul and other streets at grade. A bridge was constructed over the gorge, but permission for a grade crossing at Vincent Place was not granted until the last evening before the retirement of the 1887 council. In like fashion the enthusiasm felt for the Genesee Valley Canal Railroad a second coal road (projected in 1879 and built in the early eighties south from Rochester to Pennsylvania in the bed of that abandoned canal) was tempered by the debate over grade crossings. Permission to cross Troup Street at grade was finally granted, but no concession was made at other points, and the road's desire for a freight yard was not heeded. Nevertheless, a few years later, when the Western New York & Pennsylvania Railroad secured a lease to that line, its limited terminal facilities were expanded and coal-yards arose to blight the formerly proud West Avenue now renamed West Main Street.

More favorable circumstances cleared the paths of two other railroads that sought to open stations in the central part of the city. After some difficulty, the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh, successor to the Rochester & State Line Railroad, acquired a right of way parallel to the Batavia Branch of the New York Central, swinging off to establish a station on West Avenue and Ford Street in 1881. The eastward removal of the Central's station left the two on West Avenue somewhat distant from the new business center, though the effect was not immediately apparent. Meanwhile the Erie, lessee of the Genesee Valley Railroad, acquired the right of way on the west bank of the river as far as Court Street, and the completion of an imposing passenger station at that point in 1887 helped to revive the community's flagging hopes that some real competition would be offered to the Central.

Important gains marked an effort to develop connecting



links between several of these roads. The dream of a belt line around the city was not realized, but switch connections joining the Erie with the Western New York & Pennsylvania, and a spur line connecting the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh with the Rome, Watertown & Ogdensburg greatly facilitated the interchange of freight. Other railroad schemes that attracted support in these years included three short amusement lines, and the Rochester & Honeoye Valley Railroad (chartered in 1888 in an effort to draw into the city's orbit several towns connected only with Buffalo) secured a right of way on the east bank of the river. Rumors were rife of the intended entry of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western and the Lehigh Valley, but neither project was immediately undertaken, although the Lehigh did enter the city in 1892 over the route secured by the Honeoye.

The hopes aroused in the early eighties by the advance of the West Shore Railroads as a forthright challenger to the Central were dashed in 1885 with the news of its sale to Vanderbilt. The brief excitement a year before over the rate war had been somewhat illusory as far as Rochester was concerned, for the West Shore did not enter the city and its only effect was to stir speculation of a connection with one of the city's lesser roads. Its absorption by the Central left the city even more definitely at the mercy of that major traffic artery.

Indeed, despite the network of railroads which gridironed the city by 1890, the major portion of its trade continued to move over the New York Central. The chief contribution of the southern roads was to break the coal shortage, yet they likewise helped to restore Rochester's leadership over its Genesee hinterland, and their presence as potential competitors may have served to hold rates on the Central in check. That carrier sold a total of 531,000 tickets at Rochester in 1887, and although slightly more than half of these were for summer excursionists, bound for Charlotte or other near-by points, the long-distance

travelers outnumbered those on all other lines. The introduction of many new improvements was symbolized by the first appearance of vestibule cars in 1887 and the first trip of the Empire State Express four years later.

Possibly one explanation of the continued dominance of the Central was the partial success enjoyed by those who sought protection against rate discrimination. Complaints of freight rate inequities had been voiced in Rochester for many years before the state legislature started the Hepburn investigation in 1879. When Messrs. Hepburn, Baker, Wadsworth, and Low reached Rochester, practically everyone was eager to testify. The millers were especially emphatic about the differentials they suffered; furniture, shoe, and clothing men joined in the chorus. A year later, however, when the resulting Hepburn bill was before the legislature, a number of Rochester men, some of them now enjoying preferential rates themselves, came out in opposition to state interference with private enterprise. The *Union and Advertiser* attacked them bitterly, and the Common Council still expressed the prevailing view when it endorsed the bill. Opponents of the bill, however, encouraged by the *Democrat*, organized a Merchants, Manufacturers and Shippers Association to agitate for its defeat. Yet the bill passed, and Governor Alonzo Cornell attached his signature.

Rochester was not certain how to regard the extension of this campaign to Congress. Local businessmen took no part in the agitation. The press however became more friendly when, shortly after its establishment, the Interstate Commerce Commission granted local shippers a few early pleas for relief. Though it was too early to give final judgment, even the *Democrat* found the policies of the I.C.C.'s first year beneficial to Rochester.

Still another aspect of the development of Rochester's railroads was the struggle of the workers for improved wages and working conditions. After two spontaneous strikes in the late

1850's the first effort to form a union occurred late in 1863 when Division 18 of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers was formed at Rochester by 22 engineers in the western division of the New York Central. Their activity spurred the organization of the brakemen, but it was a cut in wages that prompted the shopworkers to go out on strike in 1868. Vanderbilt successfully crushed that first protest; the Erie however was more responsive a year later to the demands of its brakemen. Vanderbilt again hastily stamped out threatened strikes in 1873 and in 1877; on the latter occasion, after the men had terminated a brief stoppage by accepting a ten per cent cut, he forgot his pledge and fired the leading agitators in order to break the union. Vanderbilt retained the upper hand for a full decade, and in 1893 he managed by minor concessions to divert the union's furor to the Lehigh Valley which suffered considerable losses when it attempted to run its trains with green hands. As a result the Lehigh made a settlement favorable to the union, which then turned its attention back to Vanderbilt who however again escaped serious attack because of the local reaction to the violence occasioned by the Pullman strike in the Chicago area.

The long era of railroad construction and expansion was drawing to a close in the nineties. Before it ended the Lehigh Valley Railroad entered the city in September 1892 on the right of way acquired by the Rochester & Honeoye Valley Railroad on the Genesee's east bank. Vanderbilt completed the merger of the West Shore with the Central and acquired a perpetual lease of the Rome, Watertown, & Ogdensburg, but sold control of the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh to a group of coal merchants headed by Arthur G. Yates of Rochester who finally pushed the line into Pittsburgh and announced fast-train service over the entire route. The Pennsylvania Railroad assumed full operation in 1900 of the Western New York & Pennsylvania over the old lines of the Genesee Valley Canal Railroad. The Pensy soon scheduled two trains daily, one to Perry and one to

Olean, as well as one over its Northern Central track through Canandaigua, which came into Rochester over the old Auburn line. With five competing freight and passenger carriers, Rochester faced the new century in a confident mood.

### **New Competition and Mounting Frustrations**

The city's confidence in the early 1900's was not fully shared by its steam railroads. Despite their improved equipment, vast extent, and large capitalization, the five companies serving Rochester faced not only increased competition from each other but also a new challenge from the inter-urban electrics that fanned out from Rochester around the turn of the century. To strengthen their positions the steam lines endeavored to upgrade their services, enlarge their freight yards, and rebuild their stations. And when these efforts failed to achieve security, some directors of the New York Central undertook to absorb the more competitive electric roads. By introducing technological improvements of their own they prolonged their vitality for another half century.

The Lehigh Valley Railroad, the last of the major roads to enter Rochester, offered a new challenge to the Central. Its Pullman service competed with that offered on the Erie and with the plush Wagner cars of the Central. And when the Lehigh announced the regular schedule of its two Black Diamond Express trains between Buffalo and New York, which Rochesterians could board at suburban Rochester Junction, the Central responded by introducing the Twentieth Century Limited in 1902 to recapture the fast-train record. The Lehigh's plans for the erection of a proper station at Rochester were delayed because of uncertainty concerning the disposition of the old canal adjoining its tracks and by negotiations for a junction with the Erie Railroad. When the rumored scheme for that merger collapsed and a move to promote a union station failed, the Lehigh finally erected its station overlooking the

river at Court Street in 1907. The Lehigh and Erie stations, straddling the river at Court Street, and the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania stations, facing each other on West Main Street, offered competitive accommodations to those of the Central on St. Paul Street, but they could never rival the volume of its trade.

The very prominence of the Central made it the chief butt of local complaints. Vanderbilt had again located the headquarters of his western division at Rochester in 1893, making it the residential center for crews "doubling" east and west of the city, but five years later when he moved the regional headquarters to Buffalo, only to shift it back to Rochester in 1900 and then, after labor difficulties erupted locally, for a time to Syracuse, criticism in Rochester mounted. The Central had in the eighties born the chief burden of elevating its tracks to eliminate grade crossing in the central district, but as the city expanded in succeeding decades this problem again became grievous on the outskirts. As the number of fatal accidents increased, protests mounted. Attempts to enforce an 8-hour speed limit were as unpopular with citizens, who protested any longer delays at the crossings, as with the company. Of the 48 grade crossings listed in 1892, 22 were on the various lines of the Central, and the most troublesome of all was where the main line and the entrance to the east side freight yards crossed University Avenue. The Central finally agreed in 1898 to build an underpass there but before the task was completed, three years later, the street was renamed Atlantic Avenue. The new extension of University Avenue, laid out along the old route of Culver Park, did not get its underpass for another half century.

Yet in spite of the many complaints and the increased competition, the Central remained Rochester's chief carrier. In 1911 when a reporter tallied up the number of runs between Rochester and Buffalo he reported that 25 of the 58 trains making that run daily were on the Central, 5 on the Lehigh, 3 on the

Erie, 3 on the West Shore and 22 by the electric trolleys of the Buffalo, Lockport & Rochester. Another check that year revealed that the Central picked up approximately half of the 700 freight cars loaded daily at Rochester plants, and that it had a line up of 24 locomotives to distribute its empties and assemble the loaded cars into east- or west-bound trains. And in spite of the final loss of the western division headquarters in 1930, the roundhouse erected at the Atlantic Avenue freight yards in 1872 continued its vital function as the center of this freight service until 1951 when the old coal-burning engines were replaced by diesels and a new track pattern was adopted to expedite the assembling of an average of 12 freight and 3 passenger trains daily.

The first quarter of the twentieth century had witnessed the progressive integration of the freight service of the rival steam roads in an endeavor to meet the challenge of competing carriers. Although a renewed effort to establish a Rochester Belt Line Railroad collapsed in 1910, partly because of public opposition to the creation of a new set of street-level crossings on the city's outskirts, the Chamber of Commerce was able to promote the construction of interconnecting freight spurs to permit the switching of cars from one line to another. This policy was finally adopted by all lines in 1922 when the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh effected a linkup with its competitors.

That achievement made up somewhat for the failure of the steam roads to integrate their passenger service. They had in fact never seriously considered that possibility although it had played a part in the agitation for a new station over the river at Central Avenue in 1906. The Central, however, rejected the Wilgus plan, as it was called, and in 1913 erected the Bragdon station between Clinton and Joseph Avenues pulling its passenger services further from the West Main and Court Street centers of its lesser rivals. The Erie, by electrifying its line into its Court Street station in 1907, provided an entry for the big

trolleys of the Rochester & Syracuse and the Rochester, Lockport & Buffalo, both staunch competitors of the Central for almost two decades, but its passenger service declined sharply after their departure and was discontinued entirely in 1941.

All the other lines experienced a slow curtailment in these decades. The Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh sold out to the Baltimore & Ohio in 1930, but that company's desire to open a competing line to the Great Lakes at Buffalo overshadowed its interest in the Rochester connection. It spent considerable sums in the construction and maintenance of a coal loader at the Genesee docks in Charlotte in the 1940's and maintained a thriving coal trade across the lake for many years, but its passenger services from the station on West Main steadily dwindled and was completely abandoned in August 1953. The Lehigh Valley was likewise curtailing its services. It withdrew the last passenger cars from the Court Street station in September 1950, and the bus service to the Rochester Junction continued only for another six years, two years before the company secured permission from the Public Service Commission to abandon its passenger service completely.

Even the New York Central had to curtail its passenger services. It had responded to the challenge of the electric interurbans in the early 1900's by acquiring control of two of these competitors, the Rochester & Sodus Bay, and the Rochester & Eastern. Their ownership passed to the closely affiliated New York State Railways, which finally discontinued the operation of the interurban electrics in the early 1930's. Two independent suburban lines—the Rochester & Syracuse, and the Rochester, Lockport & Buffalo—likewise succumbed in the early thirties. Their demise was due less to the competition of the Central, however, than to the depression and the increasing number of private cars, which were also reducing the steam road's passenger loads. By the early forties, indeed, the Central was seizing every excuse to curtail its services. First the trains scheduled

daily on the Auburn and the Falls lines were reduced from 3 to 2, and from 2 to one on the Rome, Watertown & Ogdensburg route; then the passenger business was abandoned entirely on that last subsidiary and further reduced on all other lines. The Public Service Commission, however, refused in 1948 to permit the Central to abandon its passenger service on the Falls and Auburn lines; it rejected renewed requests for relief in 1956, but finally authorized the company to discontinue these services during the next two years.

The Central's difficulties involved its main line as well. Here the mounting competition of the airways was chiefly responsible though the progressive extension of the Thruway across the state in the early 1950's and the completion of the Eastern Expressway linking it to Rochester's downtown Inner Loop in 1961 contributed immeasurably to the Central's decline. The crippling impact of the airways had already become evident, however, cutting the outbound travelers on its regularly scheduled trains in 1960 to 50,000, while a half million passengers landed or departed from Rochester and Monroe County Airport, which had started less than three decades before on a 100-acre pasture on the city's outskirts. A full account of that development and of the expanding highway system must be reserved for another time, but the relation of these facilities to the Central's precipitous retreat from the passenger trade cannot be overlooked. The Central boldly acquired a fleet of new light-weight cars for fast streamlined trains early in 1955; two years later it employed six hostesses to upgrade the services of the Empire State Express; it also launched work on the installation of a new signal system purchased from the General Railway Signal Company of Rochester in order to operate all trains expeditiously on two tracks and permit a removal of the unnecessary tracks for economy purposes.

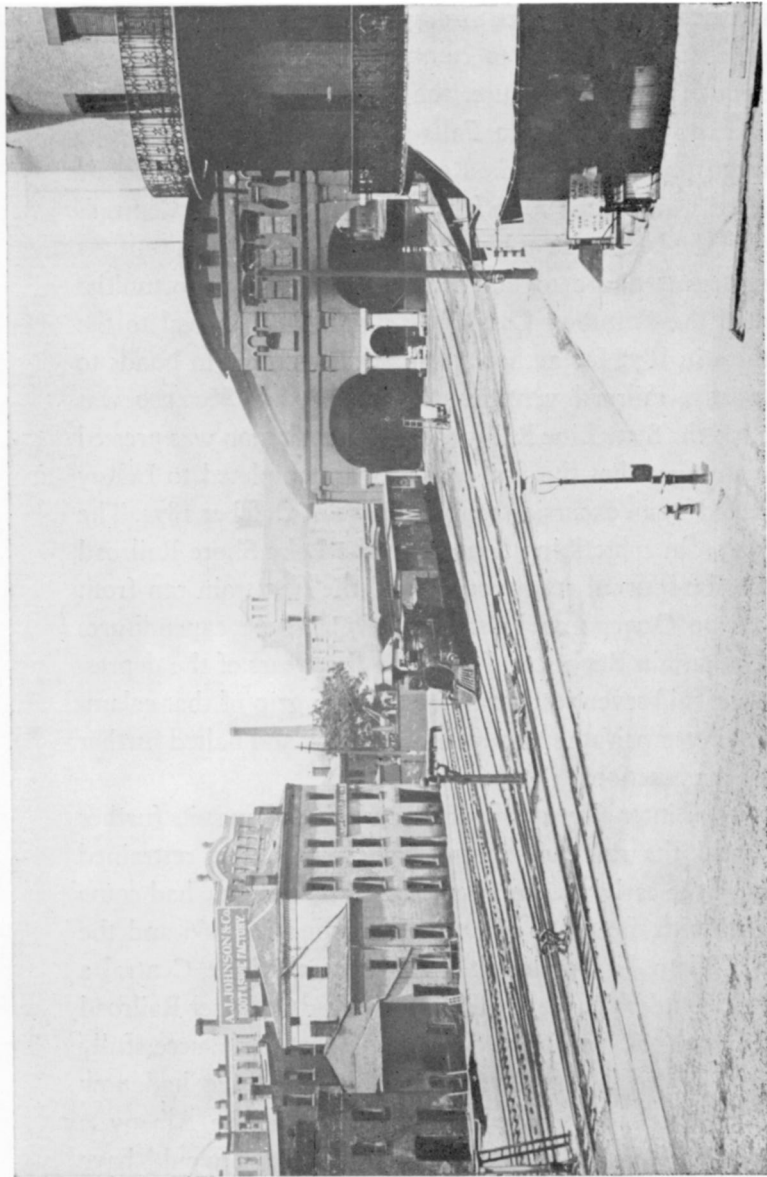
When these responses failed to stem the decline in its passenger load, the company again endeavored to reduce its ser-



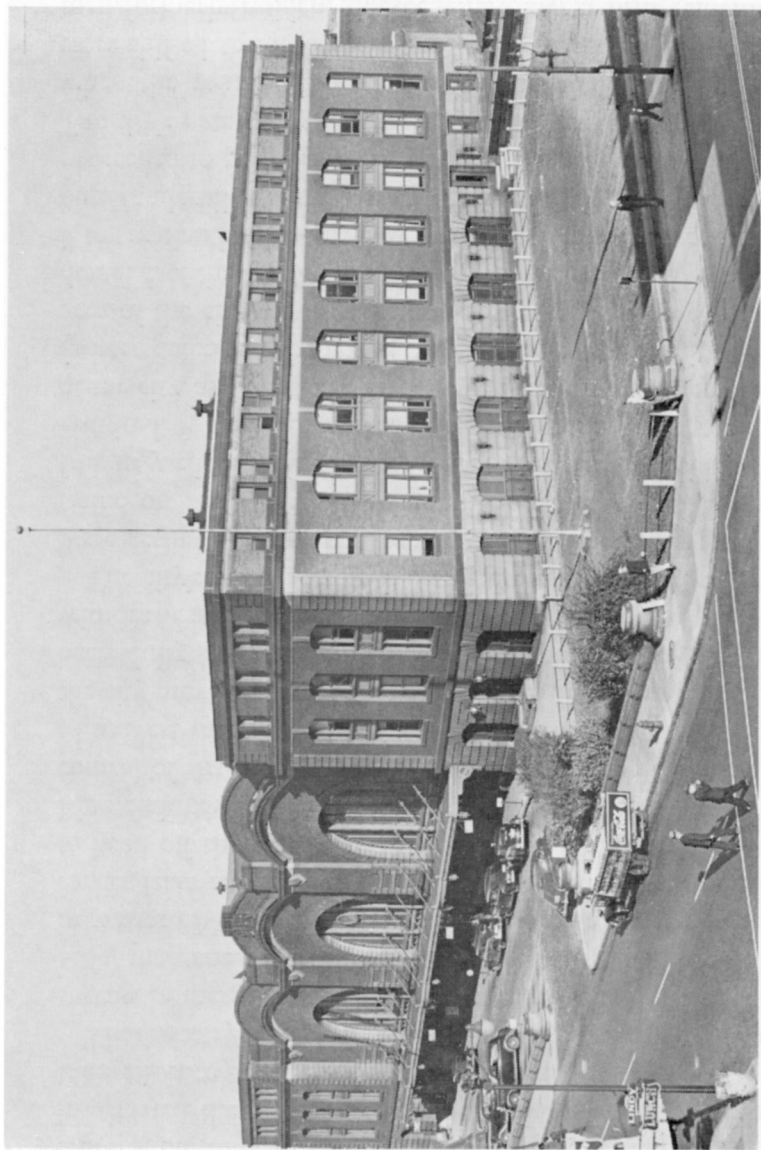
vices. It cancelled all excursion and other special trains in 1956 and sought permission to drop two of its crack trains, the DeWitt Clinton and the Empire State Express. When denied that economy, the company eliminated its Red Cap services at all stops in 1958 and the next year sold the superstructure of its handsome Bragdon station in Rochester. The sharply reduced facilities in the underground ticket office and corridor leading to the tracks and the bedraggled accommodations in the trains brought complaints that the Central was deliberately discouraging passengers in order to build a stronger case for its withdrawal. The only hope for a restoration of vitality appeared to lie in the greater efficiency and economy promised by the long debated merger of the New York Central with the Pennsylvania Railroad. When that merger was finally approved by the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1966 plans were announced for improved services and for a schedule of six trains east and west of Rochester timed to accommodate travelers. The managers of the Penn-Central, as the giant combine was named, looked confidently for increased economies in the operation of east-west freight over the upstate water level route, and Rochester industrialists hoped for improved freighting services as a result. Passengers, diverted from the airlines by inclement weather, began to comment with pleasure on the improved speed and accommodations of the Penn-Central expresses.

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The First New York Central Station at Mill Street, 1854-1883



The Third New York Central Station, by Claude Bragdon, 1913-1959