

# NICKEL PLATE ROAD

## HISTORICAL & TECHNICAL SOCIETY

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NKPHTS.org



Founded in 1966, the Nickel Plate Road Historical & Technical Society is America's only rail history organization dedicated solely to preserving the history and legacy of the Nickel Plate Road and its predecessors.

The Society publishes a quarterly magazine, maintains an award-winning website at NPKHTS.org, provides stewardship of a major archive of historical material at Cleveland State University, and offers numerous member programs and projects, including an annual convention.

As a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, financial donations and contributions of historical photos, documents, and ephemera are tax-deductible and always appreciated.



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### PURPOSE OF THE NICKEL PLATE ROAD HISTORICAL & TECHNICAL SOCIETY, INC.

The purpose of the NKPHTS is to maintain an association of persons interested in the former New York, Chicago & St. Louis Railroad (Nickel Plate Road), and to obtain, preserve, and distribute information and material related to the former Nickel Plate Road, its predecessors, and lessees. It shall be the intent of the corporation to promote, support, and preserve the historic legacy of the Nickel Plate Road through the creation of programs designed to be of benefit and service to its members, as well as to assist qualified, non-profit museums, libraries, rail groups, and historical organizations, either financially or technically, in the preservation, conservation, and/or collection of material, equipment, and memorabilia relating to the railroad and its predecessors.

### ABOUT US

The original Nickel Plate Road Historical & Technical Society, was formed in Lafayette, Indiana, in 1966. The NKPHTS was incorporated in the state of Ohio in 1972 as a nonprofit, non-stock corporation organized for educational purposes. We are recognized as a 501(c)(3) organization by the Internal Revenue Service, so all contributions of material and money are tax deductible. Information on donating money and materials to the NKPHTS may be found on our website.



The NKPHTS publishes a quarterly magazine devoted to the history of the Nickel Plate Road, Lake Erie & Western, Wheeling & Lake Erie, and the Toledo, St. Louis & Western (Clover Leaf) railroads. Included from time to time are articles on modeling the Nickel Plate, current status of Nickel Plate facilities and rolling stock, and other railroads' joint operation with the Nickel Plate. The magazine is printed in color, on high-quality gloss paper and is generously illustrated with photos and maps. Occasional newsletters are provided to keep members informed of current Society events and news, along with timely updates and/or supplements to the magazine.

For over twenty-five years the NKPHTS has published an annual calendar with fourteen high-quality photographs of the NKP, TStL&W, LE&W, and W&LE railroads.

From time to time the Society has embarked on a limited run offering of a special project. These have included timetable reprints, lithographs, books, and scale models.

The staff of the Nickel Plate Road Historical & Technical Society is all-volunteer and its business is conducted largely by mail and email. The membership has an opportunity to meet each year at our annual Convention, which is held in a Nickel Plate city. These meetings include displays, model railroad tours, swap and sale tables, slide, movie and video sessions, and tours of rail facilities. A general business meeting and banquet are the highlights of these

weekends, where the Society's officers are elected and important business is handled.



Our Society also offers numerous Internet and online activities free of charge to all of its members. We have an extensive website at NKPHTS.org which displays information, photos, documents, and Society news. We have a "Members Area" which can only be accessed by current members of the Society and which contains many items of interest, including Howard W. Ameling's collection of 5000+ Nickel Plate Road photos. Members with an email address receive a monthly eList Newsletter with the latest Society information and various articles of interest to NKP fans. We host an online discussion forum at Yahoo.com. We have our own page On YouTube.com at <http://www.youtube.com/nickelplateroad> that displays numerous Nickel Plate related videos, and video slide shows of many of our past conventions.

### HISTORY OF THE NEW YORK, CHICAGO & ST. LOUIS RAILROAD COMPANY THE NICKEL PLATE ROAD

#### Main Line Nickel Plate



It is said that the New York, Chicago & St. Louis Railroad Company was probably the only railroad in the United States built for cash in advance of the issue of stocks and bonds. The subscribers to the founding syndicate agreed to furnish the money in ten percent calls as fast as required. It was February 1881, that a party of aggressive men met in the office of George I. Seney, President of the Metropolitan National Bank of New York City. Among those in attendance was Columbus R. Cummings of Chicago, the first NKP president, Walston H. Brown, Calvin S. Brice, General San Thomas, and John G. Kennaday, who formed what was known to be the financial world as the Seney Syndicate. Later, others who participated included General D.W. Caldwell, Dan P. Ellis, and Hon. William Flemming.

In 1880, a survey was made from St. Louis to Fort Wayne, Indiana, to connect with the Lake Erie & Western Railroad, of which Mr. Brice was President. The survey was purchased by the Syndicate and two new surveys made, one from Chicago to Fort Wayne, the other from Fort Wayne to Cleveland, originally intended as an eastern terminus of the road. It was finally determined to

temporarily abandon the St. Louis branch and instead build from Cleveland to Buffalo.

Early in April 1881, Major Henry L. Merill, an experienced railroad builder, assumed charge of construction. Contracts were let for 45,000 tons of steel rails at \$65.00 per ton. Right of way was secured as fast as the surveys were made. The first rails were laid between Arcadia and McComb, Ohio, and the road was practically finished by September 1882. The first train was run over the road October 22, 1882.

The Lake Shore & Michigan Southern, later a part of the New York Central System, quickly realized the value of the Nickel Plate Road as a competitor, purchased the road and held controlling interest in it until July 1916. The Van Sweringen brothers were looking for ways to expand their real estate business in Cleveland and bought the Nickel Plate to acquire a right-of-way for a new traction line. The Vans soon found how nice railroading was and in a matter of a few years became very powerful railroad barons.

On July 1, 1922, the Nickel Plate Road was operating 523 miles of track between Chicago and Buffalo. On this date the NKP secured control of the properties formerly operated, managed, and controlled by the Lake Erie & Western Railroad Co. The LE&W added 707 miles of track reaching from Sandusky, Ohio to Peoria, Illinois, with two branches in Indiana.

On July 15, 1922, another 453 miles were added to the system by affiliation with the cloverleaf (TStL&W RR) reaching from Toledo, Ohio to St. Louis, Missouri. Thus, the Nickel Plate became a 1683-mile system of trackage serving the industrial, agricultural, and distributing region between the Mississippi River on the west, the Great Lakes on the north, and the Niagara Frontier on the east, with close traffic arrangements and service to the New England States and the Atlantic Seaboard reached through connecting lines.

The Nickel Plate purchased its first fifteen Berkshire (2-8-4) steam locomotives in 1934. Until that time the NKP had never had a locomotive that was out of the ordinary. With the Berkshire, the NKP acquired an engine perfectly suited to its needs and virtually every 2-8-4 locomotive built afterwards was based on the very successful design of the 700's.

The 1940's found the Nickel Plate setting record after record with the Berkshires. An additional fifty-five were built during the War. In 1947, the Nickel Plate received its first diesel road engines from American Locomotive Co. The streamlined diesels were affectionately called BLUEBIRDS and were the only motive power on the post 1900 Nickel Plate not painted black.

In 1949, the Nickel Plate leased the long sought Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway, which it had controlled for a number of years. The Wheeling gave the Nickel Plate a financially stable railroad that was a consistent moneymaker. With the addition of the W&LE, the stage was set for Nickel Plate's spectacular operational and financial performance of the 1950's.

#### Lake Erie & Western



The acquisition of the Lake Erie & Western Railroad in 1922 united Nickel Plate with the railroad it had been built to complement forty years earlier.

The Lake Erie & Western's Sandusky to Peoria mainline started in Ohio with the Fremont & Indiana Railroad Company on

April 22, 1853. The Fremont & Indiana was incorporated to build a line from Fremont southwest towards the Indiana State line. As years passed, more trackage was laid and through acquisitions the line was completed in 1888.

Crossing the LE&W at Tipton, Indiana was a line that extended from Indianapolis to Michigan City, Indiana. This line became part of the LE&W on April 8, 1887. Built by the Peru & Indianapolis, which was incorporated in Indiana on January 19, 1846, this was the first and oldest trackage on the Nickel Plate System .

Another LE&W branch was a line that extended from Fort Wayne, through Muncie to Connorsville. At New Castle a line split off to Rushville. This trackage was acquired by the LE&W in 1890.

In 1895, the LE&W leased the Northern Ohio, a line that extended from Akron to Delphos, Ohio. This line, which eventually became the Akron, Canton & Youngstown, was omitted from the LE&W/NKP consolidation, but the Northern Ohio's debts nearly bankrupted the Nickel Plate during the 1930's.

The Lake Erie & Western, itself, became part of the New York Central System in 1900. The LE&W was operated as a separate entity throughout its association, never integrated into NYC operation. After the Van Sweringen acquired the Nickel Plate, the New York Central sought to unload the LE&W, so the Nickel Plate and the LE&W were finally united.

The Lake Erie & Western Railroad gave the Nickel Plate another gateway -- Peoria. The Fosteria to Frankfort portion became a vital link in the latter day freight operations. The LE&W, largest of Nickel Plate's four components, became to Nickel Plate what it had never been to New York Central - an integral part of a well-run railroad.

## Clover Leaf



The Toledo, St. Louis & Western Railroad became part of the Nickel Plate on December 28, 1922. Finally, after forty years the New York Chicago & St. Louis reached St. Louis. For the Clover Leaf, the TStL&W's nickname, their line from Toledo to St. Louis was nearly ten years in building. The Toledo & Maumee began it all in 1874 with a seven-mile narrow gauge line along the Miami & Erie Canal in Toledo, Ohio. The final stretch from Charleston to St. Louis was completed in 1882, after fourteen sections had been completed earlier.

The consolidation of several narrow gauge lines formed the Toledo, Cincinnati & St. Louis Railroad in February 1881. The TC&StL&W, often called the Little Giant, fell into financial trouble almost as soon as it opened and was reorganized on June 12, 1886, as the Toledo, St. Louis & Kansas City Railroad, shorn of its Cincinnati line. It was at this time that the Clover Leaf was born. The following year the line from Toledo to Frankfort, Indiana was widened to the standard gauge. It was nearly two years before the Frankfort-St. Louis portion was completed. Unfortunately, the Clover Leaf was beset with high overhead, low profits, and stiff competition. These facts stifled growth and denied the Clover Leaf luxuries enjoyed by other railroads. So the wandering Clover Leaf brought to the Nickel Plate a road that opened up valuable connections through the St. Louis gateway, while presenting difficult operating and engineering problems.

## The Wheeling & Lake Erie



The Nickel Plate leased the Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway on December 1, 1949 for 99 years. The Wheeling brought to the Nickel Plate a gateway to the Mid-Atlantic States, access to many coalfields the Wheeling traversed, and the Nickel Plate's first lake port.

The Wheeling & Lake Erie's history began with the organization of the Carroll County Rail Road on March 9, 1850. This ten-mile horse-car line eventually grew into a five hundred mile railroad that formed a cross in northern Ohio. From the original Carroll County, the line extended west to Canton by 1880. Then it was built north to reach Cleveland in 1881, the same year the Nickel Plate was built.

The Connotton Valley, as it was now known, then turned south, where it reached Coshocton in 1883. It later reached Zanesville as a standard gauge railroad, now called the Cleveland, Canton & Southern Railroad. The C.C.&S. became part of the Wheeling on August 5, 1899.

The original Wheeling & Lake Erie was incorporated on April 6, 1871 to build a railroad between the Ohio River and Lake Erie. Toledo was selected as the northern terminus with a branch to Huron. This mainline was completed in 1889. The W&LE never did reach Wheeling, West Virginia on its own rails, as the mainline ended at Martins Ferry, Ohio, but did reach Wheeling via the Wheeling Bridge & Terminal Co., and completed a branch to Steubenville in 1891.

The Wheeling of 1899 also took control of the Cleveland Belt & Terminal Railroad Company and the Zanesville Belt & Terminal Railway Co., two belt and industrial switching lines in their respective cities.

In 1901, the Adena Railroad bought the Bellaire & Valley Junction Railway, a proposed twenty-mile line extending from Adena south to Neff, Ohio. The W&LE, through the Adena, completed this line and placed it in operation on February 1, 1903. The Wheeling and the Nickel Plate with equipment of the parent company operated this line.

The Wheeling later entered into a contract to build a line from Wellington north to the city of Lorain. This line was completed in 1907, and was also operated as part of the Wheeling system even though it rostered only a single steam locomotive. The Lorain & West Virginia was far more successful than the long abandoned Lorain, Ashland & Southern that it paralleled for its entire route. Perhaps, the Wheeling built the L&WV only to compete with the LA&S but it turned out to be a valuable link to Lorain and its steel products.

In 1910, the Wheeling & Lake Erie opened one of the finest locomotive facilities in the country, the Brewster Shops. Over the years, the Wheeling built and rolled boilers and erected fifty of their own steam engines, a feat never tried by many larger and more famous railroads. In the diesel era the Brewster Shops became the main heavy diesel repair shop for the Nickel Plate.

The Wheeling & Lake Erie entered into a contract with the Big Four Railroad in 1913 that gave the Wheeling trackage rights from Wellington to Cleveland. This gave the W&LE a much shorter route for Cleveland-Toledo traffic than before and the Wheeling soon was moving its share of freight between these cities. This contract lasted through the Nickel Plate years.

The Wheeling & Lake Erie was strictly an Ohio railroad, never reaching beyond its state lines. The Wheeling had the largest percentage of articulated (2-6-6-2) locomotives east of the Mississippi River, over 20 percent of its roster. In Depression years, they built their own switchers while other railroads were going broke. The Wheeling brought Berkshires patterned after the Nickel Plate's 700's, but with a few appliances favored by the W&LE. The Wheeling later purchased used 4-8-2's that were castoffs from other larger railroads and made good use of their remaining service.

## The Merger - NKP, N&W, AC&Y, VGN, Wabash, P&WV



Since the early days of railroading, mergers and consolidations have played an important role in the development of our nation's rail system. The influence of larger and more powerful carriers always has been a major factor in the growth and stability of the smaller railroads. The greater Nickel Plate Road was a result of the consolidation of the Lake Erie & Western and the Clover Leaf with the original Nickel Plate in 1922. Each of these roads was, of course, a result of earlier consolidations and mergers.

In the late fifties, the greater Nickel Plate found itself in a precarious competitive position. The powerful eastern rail giants were lining up in their respective merger positions. To the Nickel Plate, the potential merger of the New York Central and the Pennsylvania forecasted competitive and financial disaster. The Nickel Plate would have to find a powerful ally to assure itself of a strong position in the merger conscious East.

The Norfolk & Western Railway, looking for a way to extend its coal carrying to the Midwest, became that ally. The merger of the Nickel Plate and the Norfolk & Western could be a benefit to both railroads and develop a strong Midwest to tidewater rail system carrying a broad base of commodities.

The prospect of a Nickel Plate-Norfolk & Western alliance put the Wabash Railroad in the same position as the Nickel Plate had been; that of a competitive orphan. The N&W, an expert in the operation of parallel lines since its acquisition of the Virginian Railway in 1959, made no objections to adding the Wabash.

With the ultimate acquisition of the Pennsy's Sandusky Line as the connection between the Nickel Plate and the Norfolk & Western, the Akron, Canton & Youngstown and the Pittsburgh & West Virginia railroads were forced to ask for inclusion in the new system. After more than four years of hearings and planning, the merger became a reality on October 16, 1964.

## Origin of the Name Nickel Plate Road

As told by former president of the NYC&STL Railroad Company, Lynne L. White. The following is an excerpt from the book "The Nickel Plate Road, A Short History of the New York, Chicago & St. Louis R.R." printed in 1954. The book is a record of an address given by Mr. White to the Newcomen Society in North America, held

in the ballroom of the Hotel Lawrence, Erie, Pa., November 11, 1954. Mr. White was guest of honor at this "1954 Lake Erie Dinner".

"Through northern Ohio, already served by four railroads, location of the line developed intense rivalries among cities. Three routes were surveyed and communities along each proposed route vied in the raising of public subscriptions to donate rights-of-way. The road's general offices at Cleveland frequently were besieged by delegations hoping to bring about the routing of the line through their communities. During these inter-city rivalries was born the nickname for the New York, Chicago and St. Louis - The Nickel Plate Road - which rapidly became the name most commonly used.

Numerous legends have grown about when and how the name "Nickel Plate" was first applied. The accepted version is that it appeared first in an article in the Norwalk, Ohio, Chronicle of March 10, 1881. On that date the Chronicle reported the arrival of a party of engineers to make a survey for the "great New York and St. Louis double track, nickel plated railroad."

Later, while attempting to induce the company to build the line through Norwalk instead of Bellevue, Ohio, the Chronicle again referred to the road as "nickel plated" - a term regarded as indicative of the project's glittering prospects and substantial financial backing.

In 1882, the Nickel Plate recognized F.R. Loomis, owner and editor of the Norwalk Chronicle, as originator of the term and issued him Complimentary Pass No.1. Thus Norwalk named the road - but Bellevue finally got it."

We hope this brochure will help you gain an insight into our Society and its purpose, and further your knowledge and appreciation of a once great railroad - the Nickel Plate Road.

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