Rhinelander Railroad Association

Warrant

March 2012

President's Message: Greetings from the "Old Man"

by Jim Brown, President RRA

Another month has gone by and here we are "Marching along, together", pardon the pun. Maybe it's because I am as mad as a March hare! I better quit while I'm ahead.

We have now acquired the layout and rolling stock of Carl Oberlander and the grand mess down at the store shows it. Believe it or not, we are getting it organized and a note of thanks goes to all RRA members involved in this project. Good thing our landlord, Tim, is easy going and when he looked at all of it he said to me, "good luck!" It took three full size pickup trucks, one small pickup and two big trailers to get it all down to the store!

So, whom do you know that wants to buy some train layout building supplies? If you want to know some prices, come on down to the next business meeting of RRA.

At the last business meeting our landlord Tim, was voted in as an honorary member of RRA. He will be presented with a plaque stating such status and message of thanks from the crew.

Each week rail module detail becomes just a little bit better. Here, to the left, is a snapshot of Tom Kolbeck's several yard workers tidying up a siding.

One of our life members, James Halminiak, presented Norm Braeger with a large monetary donation. He told Norm it was given to us at RRA because we have not forgotten to send him newsletters and to help us with our new project at the store. Our thanks from the members go out to James Halminiak!

Newsletters are an activity that helps us arrive at events. They are a part of the process that helps our individual and combined knowledge and direction. It takes multiple minds and hands to make our newsletter work.

Brendan Marquardt (photo below) is one of the key cogs in the tracks of our ever changing news. Like the postal service we too deliver: by email, snail mail and the Internet. Brendan transforms electronics into print on paper and insures the mailing list is as pure an 'RRA Officers' heart. He is your assistant news editor: the Clark Kent of RRA, faster than a speeding bullet (or bullet train), more powerful than a locomotive and able to bleep (control C) tall buildings in a single bound.

Also from the members of RRA, our thoughts and prayers go out to Editor Roger Blocks and his wife, Marge, and to the family of Webmaster Paul Wussow who are going through medical issues at this time. We are hoping for the best for you folks!
At the next business meeting of RRA which will be held on Wednesday, March 7th, 2012 at 7:00 pm, there will be discussion on different issues that have come about. So come on down to the store at 123 S Brown st. and find out what is going on! Hope to see you there! Take care.

Jim Brown, President, RRA.

Ballast at New Buffalo (NBU), Michigan

by R.G. Blocks

We were school reunion visitors at New Buffalo, Michigan in 2010. It was a very posh resort atmosphere catering to the Chicago vacation and big buck condo traffic. A Casino, local winery production and a great harbor were the obvious drawing cards. Sadly, many six and seven figure properties stood empty and Michigan's infrastructure showed obvious signs of decay. Thoughts of fishing and railroad rail-fan activity made the trip upbeat. It was the wives having a reunion. Thus, us guys, their boy toys, had time to prowl.

The track appeared to be in excellent condition as it passed very close to the best addresses in the town. Crews were rebuilding the crossing at the time of our visit. They were getting ready for what everyone hoped would be a great tourist season. A ballast crew passed by twice. I was curious.

My initial rail interest was effectively the old routes of the Michigan Central (MC founded in 1846) and the Pere Marquette (PM). The PM was a passenger line, founded in1900. PM merged with the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) in 1923 or so and became part of the CSX in the 1980s. Here we are looking at Amtrak owned rail, not the freight line CSX that we'll cover in the next article. CSX runs parallel and about a mile east of here.

The Amtrak route containing New Buffalo's NBU station is 62 miles from Chicago. It proceeds north from NBU via St Joseph and Benton Harbor to Bangor, and Holland and on to terminate in Grand Rapids, MI. The total trip, Chicago to Grand Rapids is 176 miles.

Amtrak owns 97 miles of the track from Chicago to Detroit. It is the longest stretch of track owned by Amtrak west of the northeast corridor. It is among the first with positive train control and rated for 95 mph. It is the highest speed rail in the Midwest. It is soon to be upgraded for 110 mph to cut service time Chicago to Detroit by thirty minutes. A billion dollars have been spent on the Michigan portion in the last three years. We are looking at a piece of the investment in this article. The trip Chicago to Detroit of 281 miles in 6.5 hours averages 43 mph today.

I was surprised to find that New Buffalo is the 18th busiest stop for Amtrak in Michigan. It was averaging 25 passengers per day from this open platform stop in 2010. Amtrak has at least three trains per day stop at NBU in each direction. The State of Michigan DOT is paying Amtrak to support and promote this very thin ridership from what I can ascertain. It takes Amtrak about 6.5 hours to complete the Chicago to Grand Rapids run. The line thus averages about 27 miles per hour by my scorecard. Pretty lame.

I looked down and contemplated both my feet and the ballast below. It looked, much like the ballast at the street crossing. It didn't look like ballast. It didn't have the texture; but, was pretty and wouldn't cut a barefoot. This was a resort atmosphere. We were in the middle of a very posh section of town. I'm betting eye appeal had something to do with what I was seeing.

The concept of railroad ballast has much to do with tie support and drainage of water from contact with ties. On the support side of the equation we find that ties hold the track in place vertically and horizontally. To that end the ties must be trapped in somewhat an inflexible but elastic membrane of stone. Crushed stone is typically used for the purpose. The angular faces of modest size stones lock the tie in position while being porous and allowing drainage.

Crushed stone is generally inexpensive unless it must be hauled for long distances. Limestone is a good example of a typical crushed stone. Limestone is roughly 10% of all sedimentary rock. The largest limestone quarry in the world is at Roger's City, Michigan (up north on Lake Huron). Limestone aggregate is beneath most roads in the USA, is probably the white in your toothpaste, the calcium in your fortified food and the surface of the great pyramids. Limestone is a bit soft for today's heavy trains. Granite is a better choice for railroad ballast. It is however a bit more pricy than limestone. What I was seeing was neither.

Good ballast should largely fall between 2.5 and 1 inch in size with less than 10% being smaller. When ballast size is small the effective drainage rate is poor and vegetation takes root more easily. If ballast size is too large then ballast spacing is too porous and it will not support and prevent tie movement or rail deflection. Thus, tight specifications are written to prevent the purchase of improper ballast. I referred to a copy of Michigan's DOT Standard Specifications for Railroad Work 147841.7 published in 2006 (73 pages) to refresh my memory. It's a much tighter specification than I stated above.

In the Midwest quartzite is perhaps the best and most common ballast. It is essentially old sandstone that has been heated and compressed in the earth by plate tectonics and the like. Quartzite is hard, strong and maintains a sharp edge. However, when you get down to Florida you'll find inferior limestone variants might be the best aggregate that is available based on cost. Limestone breaks down in service and its fines fill and choke the void between stones and soon the main looks like many a spur (solid and choked with weeds).

The photos taken in New Buffalo, Michigan show what appears to be a partial beach gravel mix being used on under the Amtrak line going through the new station (built in 2009). It does not appear to be freshly crushed aggregate but a recent application of well worn and polished round edge beach gravel. Size appears to be skewed to the small end of any acceptable sieve spectrum. I easily counted ten or more abutted stones per tie width: indicative of sizes much less than one inch on average. It looks like what you might find along the local Lake Michigan shoreline. Thus, I took the photos. Attractive ballast; but not meeting any specification I've read.

Smooth rounded edge aggregate or good 'skipping stones', stones are inherently slippery and not as apt to block movement stone to stone and stone to tie. When you don't want your ties to move you need stones with sharp facets; not washed beach stone. But, they do look pleasant.

The guys, and that included me, caught our limit of Salmon and Lake Trout. The license, boat fuel and skipper didn't come free. Fish at

twenty-two dollars a pound, while modestly enjoyable to catch in ten-foot swells is not any more economically sound than beautiful ballast under a railroad that serving so few people. The wives gave their guys a bit of a rough time after our fishing adventure.

Enroute to the National NMRA Convention in Grand Rapids in the summer of 2012 you might stop in the town of New Buffalo and observe the track and ballast. Then judge for yourself. I'd be curious to hear your conclusion. Mine was simple. Model railroad ballast can be smaller than ideal and have sound prototype evidence backing the application. Also, you might also try fishing or skipping a few stones.

The New Buffalo Yard

by R.G. Blocks

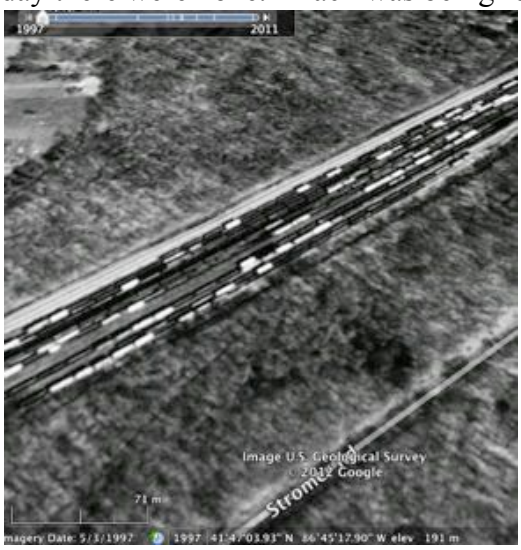
A double track CSX mainline and sixteen siding tracks ran for perhaps more than a half mile. This was once a major yard facility with two entrances. A now abandoned lead track held a couple of cars and the old station house museum held a model railroad model of New Buffalo, MI. We were greeted by a docent and invited inside. The museum held considerable memorabilia and a fine HO layout representing the area in the heyday of steam. It was neat; but weather was perfect for hiking. We wandered to the coaling tower and what was a thriving yard.

Three stalls of the old engine roundhouse now contain a gym. The coaling tower, a huge concrete affair, probably built by the C&O stands over the double track main line.

An educated guess would suggest the coaling tower was well built in its day (guess 1940) and represents little threat to today's rail traffic and will only be removed when parts start falling down.

Google Earth photos (with varying copyright dates), starting in 1997 begin on the next page. Hundreds of freight

cars can be seen in 1997, 1998, 2003 and 2005 views of the New Buffalo yards on the CSX. This day there were none. Track was being removed.



Top left May 3, 1997, and top right April 10, 1998, clearly shows hundreds of cars in the yd. Below left, July 12, 2003 and below right, May 31, 2005 the yard could not be more full.

Photos of intermediate years exist. We noted declining traffic in 2006, 2007 and 2008. When we walked the yard in 2010 it was virtually empty. However, what we found in a photo taken on April 28, 2011 copyrighted by Google and as shown above, portrayed on Google Earth left us dumb-founded.

The CSX yard at New Buffalo was empty except for a string of a half dozen empty flat cars. It was like walking thru deserted property. Hundreds of boxcars once filled sixteen double end tracks. Cars once carried the product of Michigan industry. Today, New Buffalo is no longer listed among CSX's active yards.

We walk where once track and prosperity existed.

Fishplates, tie plates, ties, and the offal of past success are piled for disposal.

When we looked at remaining track, even though apparently unused for the past year or two it was admirably free of vegetation, well drained and the ballast looked real.

The ballast in this photo on a siding at New Buffalo is what one expects on a Class I railroad. It is a quartzite or granite material with many pieces in the 2 inch area.

Lots of miscellaneous materials; well drained, no vegetation growing! Good ballast works.

Railroad Happenings: or semi local coming events..

March 3 - 4, 2012 High Wheeler Train Show, Palatine, IL info at www.highwheelertrainshow.com

March 8 - 11, 2012, Midwest Region Convention, Annual Meeting of Members, President Abraham Lincoln Hotel, Springfield, Illinois. Discount Amtrak fares: host Illinois Valley Division. Information at: www.railsplitter2012.org

March 11, 2012 Metro Model RR Club Show & Swap Meet, Circle B Recreation 6261 Hwy 60, Cedarburg, WI info at www.metrorrclub.org

March 16 – 18, 2012 Chicago O Scale Meet, Westin Lombard Yorktown Center, 70 Yorktown Center, Lombard, IL, 60148 Call 1-800-937-8461 for a room at $89 and see www.marchmeet.net Buy, Sell, Trade, Clinics, Discussion Groups, Contest, Layout Tours. Show Sat 9 AM – 5 PM and Sunday 9 AM – 2 PM.

March 18, 2012 WISE Division Meet, Best Western Plus Midway Hotel, 1005 S. Moorland Rd, Brookfield, WI

April 15, 2012 WISE Division Meet, Best Western Plus Midway Hotel, 1005 S. Moorland Rd, Brookfield, WI

April 28 – 29, 2012 Titletown Train Show, Shopko Hall, Green Bay, WI Info at www.ttsgbllc.com

May 5, 2012 NMRA Winnebagoland Division Spring Meet, Plymouth, WI

July 29 – August 4, 2012 it's the 77th National Model Railroad Convention, Grand Rapids, MI. The host club is found at www.grmrhs.org a 100% NMRA club. For info on the convention: www.gr2012.org Seventy fantastic layouts within one hour of the 12th best hotel in North America (Amway). Let's all go!

April 2013 Convention, Midwest Region, Marriot Indianapolis, IN (tentative).