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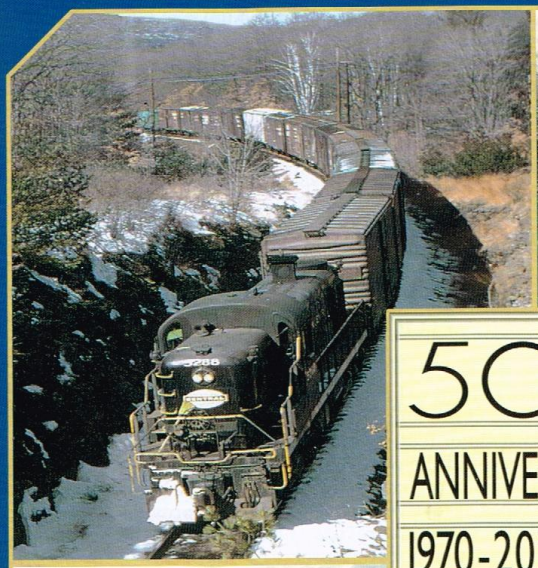

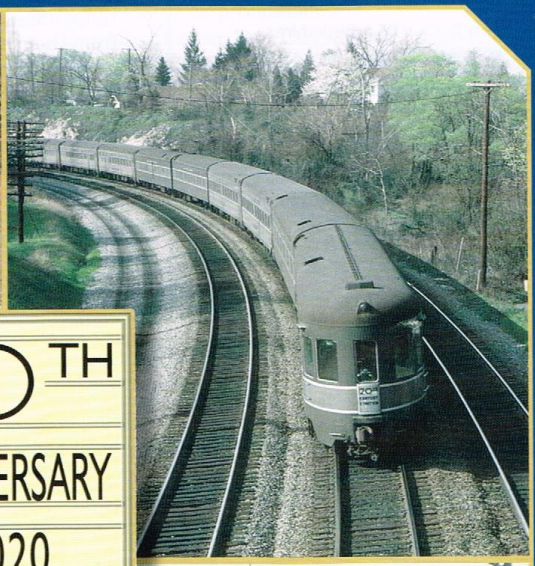

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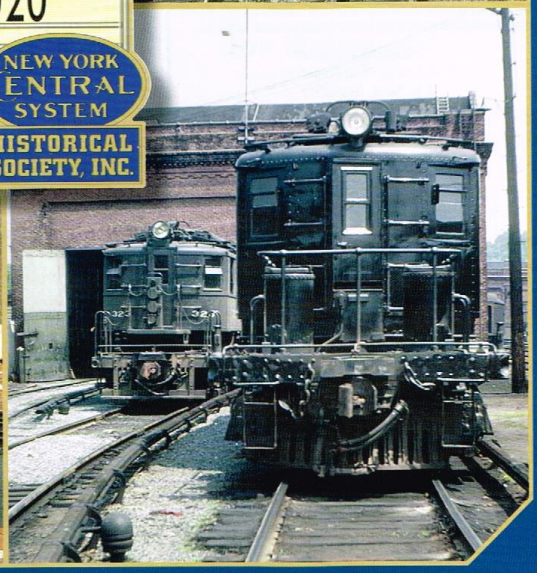


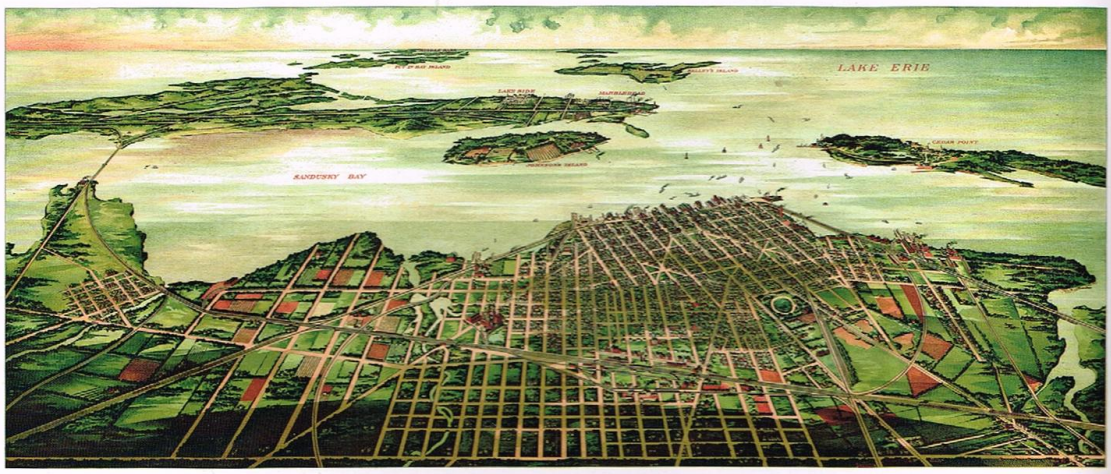
Sandusky – In at the Beginning
Part 1

BY RON HELMECI

For anyone interested in the history of the NYC lines and predecessors, Sandusky, Ohio is a mandatory station stop. In the heyday of its rail era, circa 1910, Sandusky, (pop. 30,000), hosted an extensive network of steam roads and interurban lines radiating from the downtown waterfront like a giant fan, with New York Central lines forming a garland of steel around the city. This network was built out over seventy some years, beginning in the 1830s, with construction occurring in four distinct eras.

In 1825, Sandusky lost out to Toledo and Cleveland in the competition to be the Lake Erie outlet for a canal between Lake Erie and the Ohio River. To keep alive their ambition to become the premier port on Lake Erie, Sanduskians, in an attempt not only to match but to leapfrog Toledo and Cleveland, embraced with a passion the untried technology of railroads. To this end, they spearheaded the chartering of both the Mad River & Lake Erie Railroad (MR&LE) (1832) to build from Sandusky to Dayton, and the Monroeville & Sandusky City (M&SC) to connect to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (B&O), if and when it ever reached the Ohio River. This era was marked by lack of capital, lack of experience, and lack of markets, so that while both roads managed to persevere, neither exactly thrived. The MR&LE would eventually end up as part of the Big Four, while the M&SC became part of the B&O.

Sanduskians turned to railroads to feed their port and frowned on a lakeshore route as likely to siphon off traffic. However, by the late 1840s and early 50s, events forced them to become a key part of the effort to complete a through route along the lakeshore from New York City to Chicago. To this end they chartered the Junction Railroad (1845) to build from Cleveland to Sandusky, and the Port Clinton Railroad (PC) (1852) to build from Sandusky to Toledo. In 1853, the two together became the Northern Division of the Cleveland & Toledo Railroad (C&T) and ultimately the majority of what would become the Water Level Route between Toledo and Cleveland. During this same time period, within Sandusky



SANDUSKY, OHIO.

This fine rendering of Sandusky (circa 1898) from the south provides a good overview of the city, its surroundings, and the rail network as it existed at the time. At the east end of the Bay is Cedar Point peninsula and amusement park, a major source of passenger traffic for the NYC up to the late 40s and into the 50s. The Marblehead Peninsula forms the north side of the Bay and provided considerable traffic to the NYC from its limestone quarries, orchards, and wineries; and from passengers traveling to Lakeside, a Methodist Chautauqua. Over the years the lake and the environs of Sandusky would feed a steady stream of freight to the NYC lines. Author's Collection.

proper, the MR&LE relocated its waterfront tracks from Water Street to the newly constructed Railroad Street, while relocating and expanded its shops and other facilities.

A third era began in 1868, when the C&T was swept up in the consolidation that created the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern (LS&MS). This would catapult Sandusky into the major league of railroading at the cost of becoming subordinate to the LS&MS's priorities, their foremost one being the creation of a high-speed main line between Buffalo and Chicago. To bring this about, the LS&MS made two major changes around Sandusky. First, it constructed a bypass to the south of downtown to allow through trains to avoid the waterfront congestion. Second, it rebuilt the tracks between Sandusky and Millbury Junction over Sandusky Bay. These had been removed in 1858 due to lack of traffic but had the advantage of providing a through route that was several miles shorter than the Southern Division of the C&T, which ran inland through Norwalk and Fremont.

In the final era, from the late 1880s to the turn of the century, the Lake Erie and Western Railroad (LE&W), a Vanderbilt line from 1900 to 1922, built east into Sandusky from Fremont. Also, Sanduskians, in 1889, chartered their final railroad, the Columbus & Sandusky Short Line Railroad (C&SSL), to construct a line from Sandusky to Columbus. This began service in 1891 and reached Columbus in 1893. Sunk by debt, this road would eventually become part of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Over it would ride most of the coal which made Sandusky one of the largest coal ports on the Great Lakes. While never part of the NYC System, the C&SSL was constructed in part over the former MR&LE right-of-way between Sandusky and Bellevue, which the MR&LE had abandoned in favor of a route through Clyde.

While Sandusky never reached the population and status of Toledo or Cleveland, this network served to keep its port competitive through decades of changing traffic and circumstances. Over the years, in addition to all the usual cargoes flowing through most ports, Sandusky gave rise to special and unusual traffic. Before the wheat belt moved west, Sandusky and its neighbors, Huron and Milan (birthplace of Thomas Edison), were the second largest wheat exporting areas in the world, losing out only to Odessa, Russia. Before the Civil War, slaves rode the MR&LE to freedom as part of Sandusky's Underground Railroad, while during the Civil War, Confederate prisoners were brought to a prison camp on Johnson's Island in Sandusky Bay. After the end of the war, Sandusky developed into the largest fresh water fish market in the world. Because of the need for ice to preserve the fish, Sandusky also became the largest natural ice producer west of the Appalachians. Huge quantities of fish, caviar, fish by-products, and ice left by rail year after year, with thousands of carloads of ice each year going to meat-packing houses and breweries in Cincinnati and St. Louis. As part of the Lake Erie fruit and wine belt, Sandusky shipped fresh fruits, wine, and champagne to all parts of the country. Finally, Sandusky served as the focal point for visitors to the Lake Erie islands and Cedar Point resort. This traffic began to develop after the Civil War and peaked in the 1920s, when hundreds of thousands of visitors would come by regular and special charter trains to enjoy the resorts, beaches, and wineries of Vacationland.

In this article, I intend to explore both how this rail network and its support facilities developed in and around Sandusky and how it helped local businesses to thrive over the years. It will also serve as a bit of a travel guide to those interested in exploring Sandusky on their own. It is still a vibrant rail center served by Norfolk Southern and Amtrak. While much has been lost, its rail and port past are still evident throughout the city. Fortunately, Sanduskians have been appreciative of this past, and local historical societies have placed multiple markers to guide the tourist. That being said, I will begin this account of Sandusky's railroads at its beginning. For Sandusky the beginning was the mother of all snubs, one which rankled decades later.

Sandusky's Harbor

Sandusky City, in 1820, was a three-year old settlement of a few hundred people nestled in the southeast corner of the Sandusky Bay, one with expectations (pretensions) of grandeur. Cleveland, 60 miles to the east on the Cuyahoga River, and Toledo, 45 miles to the west on the Maumee River, possessed similar populations and pretensions.

There the similarities ended, because the three bodies of water had markedly different characteristics. The Cuyahoga had no harbor, emptying directly into the lake, and was so sinuous that it made corkscrews envious. The turbid Maumee, which drained the bulk of the Black Swamp and also had no harbor, served as little more than a hatchery to a nearly infinite number of frogs and mosquitos. In contrast, fair Sandusky Bay, could, with justification, lay claim to being the best and prettiest natural harbor on Lake Erie, if not the whole of the Great Lakes. Roughly twenty miles long and two miles wide, it covers an

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Sandusky... *(Continued from page 11)*

area of about sixty-four square miles. The Marblehead Peninsula, a limestone outcropping left behind by the glaciers, forms the north side, the Cedar Point peninsula, a sand spit, forms the eastern boundary, while the Sandusky River empties into its western end. Since storms tend to brew from the northwest in this part of the lake, the harbor proved extremely well situated to provide shelter. Its one drawback was its relative shallowness, with an average depth of only fourteen feet. In many spots the depth is no more than two or three feet.

With the anticipated opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, canal fever was sweeping the country. Ohioans, especially, were clamoring for a canal to connect Lake Erie to the Ohio River and so tie into New York City and its international trade network. Whichever of Toledo, Cleveland, or Sandusky won the competition to be the outlet for the canal on Lake Erie would have a possibly insurmountable advantage over the others. Given their location on Sandusky Bay and central location in the state, Sanduskians could be forgiven for thinking that the canal was theirs to lose. But lose it they did.

In its 1825 decision, the Ohio Canal Commission, citing insufficient water supply in the center of the state to feed a canal, rejected a one-canal option with its outlet at Sandusky. Instead, it voted in favor of two canals, an eastern one terminating at Cleveland and a western one beginning at Cincinnati and ending at Toledo. The citizens of Sandusky, irate and feeling swindled, didn't have to look long or hard to see who did the swindling. The Canal Commission had only three members: Alfred Kelly from Cleveland, M. F. Williams from Cincinnati, and Ebenezer Buckingham, Jr. of Zanesville. Kelly and Williams bought the support of Buckingham for two canals by offering a canal extension to Zanesville off a canal to Cleveland. On reflection, Sanduskians decided that they never had a chance.

One need only reference a passage in *Sandusky Then and Now* to see how this betrayal still rankled fifty years later.

> No city on the shore of Lake Erie was better favored by nature to become a prominent place in general world commerce than Sandusky. The story of the injustice done Sandusky more than 50 years ago, by which its development was hindered and at the same time its life was nipped in the bud, could fill the pages of a fair-sized book. But, now that our neighbors have grabbed commerce for themselves, of what use is it to waste more words telling of the wonderful harbor which stands undeveloped on the lakeshore? What advantage is there in being forced to knock each year like beggars at the door of the nation's capital only to repeat the same story? The golden opportunity which Sandusky had fifty years ago to elevate itself to a key position in the commerce and trade of Ohio will never return. Might makes right. For many years Cleveland and Toledo have stretched out their arms like an octopus to grab and suck up everything which could be to their advantage and profit.[1]

If Not a Canal, Then a Railroad

But Fortuna had not turned her back entirely on Sandusky. What looked to be the worst betrayal possible soon began, for two reasons, to look like a blessing in disguise. Providentially, just as the commission was announcing its decision, a new fever started to sweep the nation, this time for railroads. Sanduskians realized that if they could seize the moment and construct a railroad to Dayton, they might yet win the day.

Dayton was the logical destination because the western canal between Cincinnati and Toledo was to be built in two segments. The first segment, the Miami Canal, would connect Cincinnati to Dayton, via the Miami Valley. Only after both the eastern Ohio Canal from Portsmouth to Cleveland and the Miami Canal were completed, would work begin on the segment from Dayton to Toledo. Building to Dayton would provide access to the Ohio Valley trade while sparing the expense of building all the way to Cincinnati. And if a railroad could be constructed quickly enough, it might be possible to show that the canal's extension to Toledo wasn't needed, thereby crippling Toledo, maybe permanently.

Given this interest it is not surprising that by 1826 articles concerning railroads began to appear in the *Sandusky Clarion*. One such, dated January 7, 1826, spells out forty-one "facts and opinions relative to the construction of Rail Ways, collated from a pamphlet recently published in the state of Pennsylvania." These were focused on costs of construction, pulling power, safety, etc., and showed how much uncertainty and guesswork surrounded this new mode of transportation. For example, Item 5 states, "It is now ascertained that smooth wheels are capable of adhering to rails on which no cogs or other protuberances exist. All the locomotive engines and railways in England are now constructed without cogs. The adhesion has been found to be 1-25th of the load." Item 17 states, "Rail ways composed entirely of wood, may be advantageously constructed at very small expense in the United States, when the quantity of transportation is inconsiderable." As a final example, Item 25 asserts, "If the ascent is not greater than 12 1-2 feet in a mile, hills offer no obstacle whatever to rail ways: for, by diminishing the velocity in ascending, and increasing it in descending, the same load may be transported on an inclined

1. Von Schulenburg, Ernst, *Sandusky Then and Now* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1959) – p. 60.

plane, and with the same average velocity as on a level." Obviously, some of these items would stand the test of time better than others, but they gave the early pioneers something to go by.

One such pioneer was Eleutheros Cooke, lawyer, local booster, state representative, and eventually a one-term U.S. Representative from Sandusky. He was christened "Eleutheros," which means "free" in Greek, to honor the drafting of the U.S. Constitution in the year of his birth. Although his name is probably not a commonplace one to the average American, his youngest son Jay is much better known. Regarded as the first investment banker, he made his fortune as the man who "financed the Civil War" through bond sales, only to lose most of it in the collapse of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

Cooke's efforts were key to passing the charter for the MR&LE. The canal interests were adamantly opposed, knowing full well that it would suppress rates and endanger the repayment of the canal debt. However, the enabling legislation for the canals had a provision that for those districts "bypassed" by the canals and not able to enjoy benefits from them, the state would help pay for roads or other modes of transportation, which was stretched to include railroads. Since the region from Sandusky to Dayton was one of the "bypassed" regions, funds from the state could be made available for construction. With Cooke's help and encouragement, committees in each county between Sandusky and Dayton were organized to advocate for the railroad and to raise funds. Their joint efforts bore fruit when the charter for the MR&LE was finally passed on January 5, 1832.

This plaque, located in East Battery Park, commemorates the MR&LE groundbreaking 1835. Photo by the author.

As chartered, the capital stock was set at one million dollars, divided into shares of fifty dollars each. The road was to be built through or near Dayton, Springfield, Urbana, Bellefontaine, Upper Sandusky, Tiffin, and Lower Sandusky, ending in Sandusky proper. It had the authority "to transport, take and carry, property and persons upon the same, by the power and force of steam, animals, or any other mechanical or other power, or of any combination of them, which the said corporation may choose to employ."[2] By this means the corporation would fulfill its national objective of uniting the valley of the Mississippi with the Great Lakes and thereby the Atlantic states through the New York Canal. The state had the authority to purchase it after twenty years, later amended to forty.

The 153-mile road was estimated to cost $1,897,668 ($12,403 per mile with a horse path) or $1,671,228 ($10,923 per mile for steam only). The cheapest portion would be the first 35 miles between Sandusky and Tiffin. One hundred twenty-five miles of the line would have grades of 40 feet per mile or less, with the steepest portions having 50 feet per mile. The first section to Tiffin would be essentially level.

A Leisurely Beginning

September 17, 1835 was a red-letter day for Sandusky. Ground was broken simultaneously for both the MR&LE and the M&SC. Eleutheros Cooke was there, along with future president William Henry Harrison and other assorted dignitaries including two Wyandot Indian chiefs. Over 1,000 others converged on East End Park on Sandusky Bay. As was the custom, copious speeches and endless toasts (whiskey sold for ten cents a barrel) sanctified the event, while cannons boomed and steamboats, with banners flying, filled the bay.

Jay Cooke noted that "my father was the orator of the day. General William Henry Harrison and many other notables were present and the guests all dined at our house. There was a procession, a band and a

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2. *Charter of the Lake Erie and Mad River Rail Road Company*, Gallagher – Printer, Springfield, 1833, p. 7.

Sandusky... *(Continued from page 13)*

cannon, and I remember that we boys all walked in the parade and had a big time generally."[3]

In this era of paper railroads, ground-breaking ceremonies were a dime a dozen. Actual ground-breaking and construction were much rarer phenomena. While both roads would buck the odds and start physical construction, work advanced at a leisurely pace, especially in light of the onset of the 1837 depression.

With right-of-way and grading work progressing towards Bellevue, President J. H. James, of Urbana, decided to head east to shop for equipment, including a locomotive. This railroad baron without a foot of track ended up at the Rogers, Ketchum and Grosvenor company in Paterson, New Jersey. Here master locomotive builder Thomas Rogers had just completed his first locomotive. It had been built for the New Jersey Railroad and Transportation Company and tested on their track on October 3, 1837. On its test run it had completed 22 miles in 46 minutes, which sounds quite respectable even today. For some reason it was back at the shop and apparently available for sale. It was a 4-2-0 with 11 x 16-inch cylinders, 54-inch drivers, a weight of 19,000 lbs., and a gauge of 4 feet, 10 inches. Rogers had incorporated his innovative patented counter-weighted driving wheels, which were made of cast iron with hollow spokes. The spokes opposite the axle crank were cast solid to provide counterbalance.

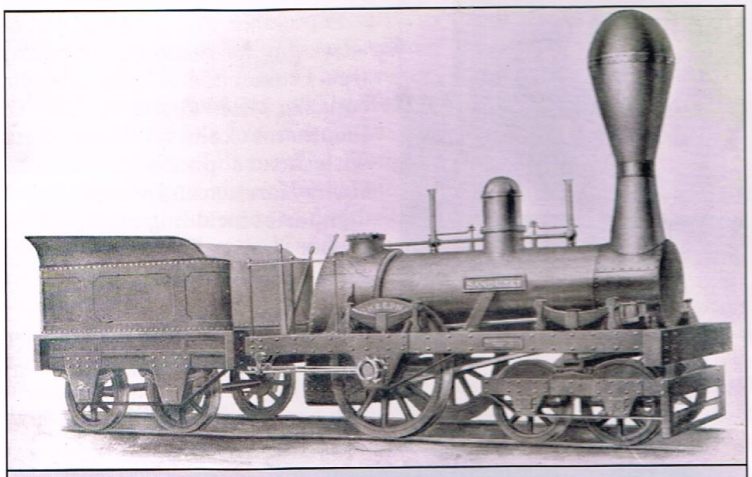
This engine was apparently the first to sport a steam whistle, which, if legend can be believed, bewitched James into buying the engine. He was not alone. The haunting sound of the locomotive whistle would bewitch the American public at large; transforming the steam locomotive from a mundane piece of iron into an American icon, forever etched into American culture. To Rogers and the MR&LE goes the honor of bringing this gift to the American people.

This canal buster, appropriately christened the *Sandusky*, was shipped to Sandusky via Albany and the Erie Canal, arriving in Sandusky Harbor on December 2, 1837 aboard the schooner *Sandusky*. A platoon of fifty men unloaded it. An ox team and a sled were used to move it to Knight's blacksmith shop at Columbus and Market Streets for finishing. From there it was hauled to the site of the groundbreaking, where it was placed on 2.25 X .625-inch strap iron rails. It couldn't go far, since only enough track had been laid to hold the locomotive. Consequently, its first task was to haul the material needed to extend the road to Bellevue, about fifteen miles southwest of Sandusky. Track laying proceeded rapidly, and operations began on May 11, 1838 with the *Sandusky* pulling the first load of freight.

Opening day was well documented by David Campbell of the Sandusky *Clarion*:

> Business has fairly commenced on this road. On the 11th inst. I had the pleasure of seeing the locomotive Sandusky start with a train of freight cars, for Bellevue, with the first load of merchandise, as I was informed, ever transported on this road; and on Monday, a passenger car having been added to the others, I availed myself of an invitation from Mr. Shoemaker, chief engineer, to make a trip by the afternoon line, in company with several gentlemen. There were several freight cars, besides the passenger car, and although there were several detentions, we reached Bellevue in an hour. After remaining a short time and walking through the town, which was greatly improved since I last saw it, we were warned by the steam whistle that the cars were unloaded and ready to return. We started at a pretty good speed, and after running about a mile, a person was observed running down a road that intersected the line, waving his handkerchief. Before the cars could be stopped, he was a quarter mile or so behind. The locomotive ran back, and taking the passenger on board, set off at a fine speed – I know not at what rate; we reached Sandusky in 45 minutes from the time of starting. I understood that 5 minutes detention was occasioned by taking in the passenger. Thus running 15 miles in 40 minutes – or 2 minutes and 40

3. Oberholtzer, Ellis Paxson Ph.D,. *Jay Cooke, Financier of the Civil War*, (George W. Jacobs & Co., Philadelphia, 1907) – p. 28



This is an artist's rendering of the *Sandusky*, the MR&LE's first locomotive. It was built with several innovations, such as a steam whistle and hollow driving wheel spokes. A well-constructed piece of equipment, it served the railroad for years. In fact, it was the railroad's only locomotive from December 1837 until June 1841. The first engineer was Thomas Hogg, and he would have been assisted by a fireman and wood passer. The mists of history shroud its fate but the best evidence suggests that it was scrapped between 1850 and 1854. Photo courtesy of the Sandusky Public Library.

seconds to the mile. Some of the distance was performed at a speed which would have been alarming, if we had not reposed full confidence in the skill and prudence of the engineer and his assistants.[4]

At this time the MR&LE possessed one 24-person passenger coach with no central aisle. The conductor used a footboard to navigate around the exterior of the coach. The freight cars were open-top, two-axle types with a capacity for 100 bushels of wheat, or about three tons by weight. In bad weather tarps were used to protect the freight.

Initially, the railroad operated a daily round trip to Bellevue at a speed of twelve miles an hour. The first engineer was Thomas Hogg, who had originally worked on construction of the *Sandusky* at the Paterson works. He was in charge of shipping the locomotive, and when he arrived in Sandusky the railroad made, and he accepted, an offer to be the engineer. Unlike postmen, rain, snow, and the gloom of night stayed him from his runs. During rainstorms, he simply stopped the train and ran for shelter until it cleared. Some speculate that the term "hogger" for a railroad engineer goes back to his name.

The railroad reached Tiffin, twenty miles farther on, in 1841. The engine rolled in on the stringers for lack of strap iron, reflecting hard times and shoestring construction budgets. Soon after, Charles Dickens, literary lion of England, rode and published his assessment of the route for posterity. In his tour through the United States in that year, chronicled in his *American Notes*, he traveled north from Cincinnati, staying overnight in Upper Sandusky. He wrote,

> Leaving this town directly after breakfast, we pushed forward again, over a rather worse road than yesterday, if possible, and arrived about noon at Tiffin, where we parted with the extra. At two o'clock we took the railroad; the traveling on which was very slow, its construction being indifferent, and the ground wet and marshy; and arrived at Sandusky in time to dine that evening. We put up at a comfortable little hotel on the brink of Lake Erie, lay there that night, and had no choice but to wait there next day, until a steamboat bound for Buffalo appeared. The town, which was sluggish and uninteresting enough, was something like the back of an English watering-place, out of the season.[5]

The MR&LE reached Springfield, near Dayton, in 1849, where it connected with the Little Miami Railroad (LM), forming the first through line from Cincinnati to Lake Erie. It reached Dayton proper in 1851, where it formed a new alliance with the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton Railroad (CH&D), which had built north from Cincinnati, and abandoned its ties to the Little Miami. It would maintain a monopoly for two brief years, until Clevelanders completed their own link over the Cleveland, Columbus & Cincinnati Railroad (CC&C).

4. Frohman, Charles E. *Sandusky's Yesterdays*, (The Ohio Historical Society, 1968) – p. 70.

This replica of the *Sandusky* was created for exhibition at the World Columbian Exhibition held in Chicago in 1892-1893. The display included both actual vintage locomotives and wooden/papier mache reproductions such as this. As a true pioneer locomotive, the *Sandusky* more than earned its place in the exhibition. This reproduction is currently on display at the Mad River and Nickel Plate Museum in Bellevue, Ohio. Photo by author.

While bringing business and prosperity to Sandusky, it also brought disaster. Emigrants, pouring into Sandusky by train and lake steamers, triggered an outbreak of cholera in 1848. Killing hundreds, it lingered in Sandusky for several years and gave the city a reputation as an unhealthy place to live.

On a brighter note, the MR&LE offered a lifeline of hope and liberty for slaves fleeing the South. Many Sanduskians, originally from New England, had strong abolitionist leanings. With easy access to Canada over Lake Erie, they turned Sandusky into one of the most important links in the Underground Railroad. Sympathetic railway workers on both the MR&LE and the M&SC played a game of cat-and-mouse with slave hunters, sneaking slaves north in coffins, in closed cars, and in other ways.

After the Civil War broke out in 1861, a prisoner-of-war camp was established on Johnson's Island in Sandusky Bay. Originally for officers only, it

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5. Dickens, Charles, *American Notes, For General Circulation*, (Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 345 Hudson Street, New York, New York, 2015) – p. 219-220.

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Built in 1838 and replaced by a new facility in 1853, the original MR&LE passenger depot, while looking a little down at the heels, was still standing at the corner of Jackson and Waters streets around 1900. Photo courtesy of the Sandusky Public Library.

eventually grew to hold over 10,000 prisoners of all ranks. Many rode north on the MR&LE.

Circling back to Sandusky proper, after groundbreaking, the MR&LE laid rail and constructed a number of facilities within Sandusky. Sanduskians had been heavy initial subscribers to MR&LE stock. In lieu of cash, many had chosen to pay for their stock with land. Ultimately the MR&LE ended up owning 176 lots within the city and 36 outside of it. Most were to the west of downtown with many of the remainder along the waterfront and Water Street. To make good use of these holdings, the MR&LE, in 1837, laid a little over a mile of rail west on Water Street, roughly between Meigs and Shelby streets. At Shelby Street, the tracks turned south along Pearl Street, then west at Mills Street and finally southeast along today's Old Railroad Street towards Bellevue (see Map I). Stone fill was used to construct approximately 3,400 feet of docks and wharves along the waterfront.

The MR&LE's first depot was at the northwest corner of Jackson and Water streets while the company office was located about a block away, just east of Columbus Street. The first company machine, blacksmith, wood, and paint shops were situated on the south side of Water Street across from the depot.

Another icon of American railroading was born in these shops. Fed up with the early "cowcatcher," which was essentially two curved posts designed to lift objects off the tracks, an engineer demanded the company come up with a better design. A Mr. Eastman, henceforth known as the "cowcatcher" man, designed the now familiar shape that was meant to push objects to the side. Ever afterwards he wore a small silver model as a watch charm. In appreciation, management awarded him his regular wages.

Nearby, W. W. Wetherell set up the Fulton Car Shops, located at the southwest corner of Fulton and Water streets. They produced freight and passenger cars for the MR&LE and later for other roads. Their main claim to fame is the development, by master carpenter Samuel Catherman, of the center-aisle, end-door passenger car with reversible seats to replace the early English-style cars.

Grain a Major Commodity

The MR&LE constructed a grain-handling complex near the west end of downtown which was cutting edge for the day. The facility included a 150-foot by 60-foot, three-story-tall warehouse for storage with a capacity of 150,000 bushels. Steam powered conveyors, spouts, and screens permitted the unloading, weighing, and transferring of wheat from rail cars into docked vessels.

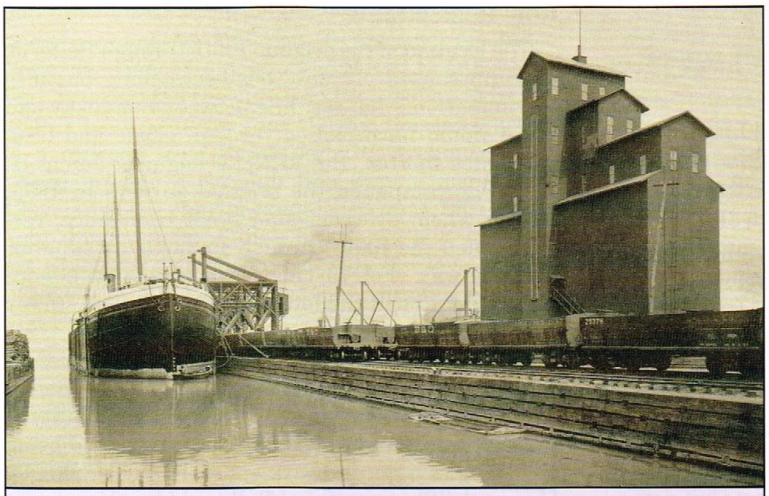
Wheat was a vital item of traffic for the MR&LE. As farmers cleared the forests of northern and central Ohio, it was often the first crop planted. Grown for export, it poured forth to world markets through the Erie Canal and New York harbor. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, as output expanded and before the wheat belt moving west, the Sandusky area briefly constituted the second largest wheat shipping district in the world.

MR&LE Wheat Shipments - By Month 1846 to October 1847 (in bushels)

October	November	December	January	February	March	April
37,695	63,674	13,656	18,912	64,416	40,876	63,634

May	June	July	August	September	October	Total
122,204	86,105	96,828	87,923	79,451	74,516	849,897

According to the railroad's 1847 Annual Report, wheat shipments by month for the preceding several months are shown in the above table.



The B&O had a long-term presence in Sandusky, gaining entry over what was originally the M&SC. Unlike the PRR, which mainly shipped coal through Sandusky, the B&O was a general freight carrier. While all the infrastructure is gone, the slips still remain and have been converted into a waterfront park. This is a view of the B&O elevator and what appear to be ore cars in the foreground. The MR&LE built a similar elevator complex on the western side of the downtown. Photo courtesy of the Sandusky Public Library.

The same report lists 145 freight cars on the roster. If these had a capacity of 100 bushels each, then in a month like May they would have needed roughly 45 cars a day to handle the wheat alone. Assuming an equal number of empties for return haul, it would seem that the system was straining near capacity, and all this freight was still rolling over the old strap iron.

Major Changes and Upgrades

The MR&LE's initial rail and facility layout in and around Sandusky would be transformed from 1848 to 1853. By the late 1840s, the days of pioneer railroading were coming to a close, and Ohio was on the cusp of its greatest rail-building era. Within Sandusky virtually everything would change. Strap rail would give way to T-rails, the waterfront would be reconfigured, and the MR&LE would relocate and expand its facilities. A new road, the Junction Railroad, constructing west from Cleveland, would enter downtown Sandusky over pilings in the bay and run tracks along the waterfront parallel to those of the MR&LE.

For years there had been discussions about moving the railroad tracks from Water Street to a new street formed by filling in part of the waterfront. It is not exactly clear what the rationale for this was, but by 1849 the go ahead was obtained to create Railroad Street between Water Street and the bay. Because the Sandusky, Mansfield & Newark Railroad (SM&N), the former S&MC, had its piers, roundhouse, and shops at Warren Street, the new street would begin just to the west at Franklin Street and extend through the downtown to just past Lawrence Street.

Surveying and fill work took until about 1853. As a result, the Junction Railroad was able to use it when laying its tracks, inaugurating service on July 22, 1853. The MR&LE, after laying track in early December on the south side of the street, removed its tracks from Water Street. Finally, at some point either the SM&N or its lessor, the B&O (1872), laid tracks along the north side of the street. Since each needed access to different piers, the resulting tangle of tracks and switches became quite impressive.

Rather than continue to use the shops on Water Street, in 1853 the MR&LE built new shops at the west end of Market Street. These included a machine shop and a repair/engine room in a 300 by 160-foot stone building flanked by two attached blacksmith shops, each 40 by 60 feet. Twenty-six tracks entered this building from three turntables.

Being solicitous of the welfare of its employees, in 1850 the company constructed a block of employee housing at the corner of McDonough and Adam Streets. Today known as 1002 to 1018 West Adams Street, this housing is still in use. Aside from some modernization, the exterior appears to have changed little from when it was built. Should anyone want to

(Continued on following page)

The employee housing units constructed by the MR&LE in 1850 at the southeast corner of McDonough and Adam Streets are still in use today. Despite being nearly 170 years old, they look quite fine. Photo by the author.

Sandusky... *(Continued from page 17)*

live in a railroad artifact, units change hands every so often.

The two final changes for the MR&LE were the construction of a new line between Sandusky and Tiffin and the relaying of strap with T-rail. Both involved some bemusement and head-scratching.

In his 1861 Report to Stock and Bondholders, O. Follett, President of the Sandusky, Dayton and Cincinnati Railroad (SD&C), the late MR&LE, remarked,

> The condition of the road-bed and track demands serious attention, ... In 1851 and '52, the track was laid with T-rail, which took the place of the original flat-bar or strap-rail. From some unaccountable theory of economy, the new iron was put down without chairs. Much of the track was laid in clay, without sufficient ballasting; ..... From that time forward no persistent measures have been carried out for bringing the track up to the required standard of a first-class road. Doubtless the reason may be traced, in the earlier as in the later period, to want of means.

One wonders how the cars and locomotives stayed on the rails.

While Railroad Street has long been renamed Shoreline Drive, the pier tracks still remained, although paved over. During the end of June and beginning of July 2019, the buried tracks were being removed, ending their nearly one-hundred-and-seventy-year presence. Photo by the author.

Line Relocations

The location of the original route through Bellevue to Tiffin caused not only head-scratching but also recriminations. A direct line between Sandusky and Tiffin would have passed through Clyde and been four miles shorter. But MR&LE engineer James H. Bell, who completed the original surveys in 1835, and in whom everyone had great confidence, recommended the route through Bellevue as superior in every way. For various reasons, this confidence began to falter in the late 1840s, and a new survey was commissioned for a line through Clyde. This quickly established that every one of Bell's representations concerning grades, streams, embankments, and other obstacles with respect to the suitability of the original line were false. Relocating would bring operating savings and save approximately $500,000 of capital. What prompted Bell to choose the inferior route is not known, but suspicion centered both on his being a large property holder in Bellevue and the similarity of the town's name to his own.

The Sandusky and Indiana Railroad (S&I) was incorporated to construct a new route through Clyde to Tiffin. This route left downtown Sandusky to the west of the original MR&LE route and was placed in service in 1851. The towns on the original route did not go down without a fight, and it wasn't until 1858 that the route through Bellevue was abandoned.

A Change of Purpose

From the first, Sanduskians viewed railroads as an extension of their port and as a means of enticing shippers and passengers to use it. Consequently, they were somewhat hostile to the idea of a lakeshore railroad, which would more likely divert traffic from the port rather than add to it. However, they recognized that two factors made a lakeshore line almost inevitable. First, western Lake Erie and Sandusky Bay, being quite shallow, tend to freeze over in most winters, bringing all shipping to a halt. When not frozen, violent gales and thunderstorms could kick up immense waves in a very short time, giving western Lake Erie a well deserved reputation as a graveyard of ships and passengers. Many a traveler and shipper would gladly choose any alternative over the lake in the fall and spring, when the storms were at their worst. Second, settlement had moved well past Sandusky, and new cities, such as Detroit and Chicago, were beginning to boom and would need rail connections to the East Coast. Anyone who could read a map realized that the best routes passed through northern Ohio.

By 1850 rails were approaching Toledo from the west and Cleveland from the east. The lakeshore

gap from Toledo to Cleveland was going to be closed one way or another and soon. In anticipation, Judge Lane, one-time president of the MR&LE, and others had incorporated the Junction Railroad on March 2, 1846, under a charter that allowed the construction of a railroad from Sandusky to Cleveland, which would provide a through line from Cincinnati to Cleveland. The charter languished until 1851, when John Boalt, Judge Lane's brother-in-law, and others chartered the Toledo, Norwalk & Cleveland RR (TN&C), to build an inland line through Norwalk and Fremont between Cleveland and Toledo.

This galvanized the Sandusky interests into action. They quickly amended the Junction charter in 1851 to allow building west from Sandusky by bridging Sandusky Bay, crossing the Maumee River at Perrysburg, and then continuing on to connect with roads building east from Chicago. Toledo would be reached by a branch line. Most of this ambitious program never reached fruition. By the time work started on the Cleveland-to-Sandusky segment, the TN&C opened for business in the beginning of 1853, completing the linkage by rail of New York City and Chicago.

Recognizing that they were better off together, the TN&C and the Junction merged in 1853 into the Cleveland and Toledo Railroad (C&T), which completed construction between Cleveland and Sandusky. In approaching Sandusky from Huron, a route was selected parallel to Cleveland Road until just south of Castaway Bay. There it swung north to approach Sandusky's downtown over a causeway in the bay. In so doing, the railroad created a small enclosed body of water soon dubbed the East End Cove. This sheltered area of water immediately became popular as a small boat harbor. To permit access, the railroad installed a small drawbridge at the foot of Washington Street in 1853. This bridge was initially hand operated.

Once the tracks left the causeway they were laid on Water Street as far as Franklin Street, just west of the SM&N pier tracks. At Franklin Street they were diverted to the new Railroad Street. On leaving downtown, tracks were extended along the shore of the West Bay on cribbings, continuing along the lakefront past the small settlement of Venice before turning north to cross the bay.

The road was completed to Berea in August, 1853, and the first eastbound train left on September 10. According to the Sandusky *Commercial Register* announcement,

> the train for Berea leaves here today at 3 ½ P.M. Returning, leaves Berea at 11 A.M. arriving here at 1 ¼ P.M. The train is under the conduct of Mr. Pease, late of the Cleveland & Cincinnati Road, and is favorably known as a gentlemanly Conductor. Wetherell turns out two beautiful First Class Passenger and one Baggage Car for the maiden train. Other cars for the passenger trains are in the course of construction and will be finished at an early day. [6]

Since the Junction charter had been challenged over whether it provided the authority to bridge Sandusky Bay, the Port Clinton Railroad was specifically chartered in 1852 to build from Sandusky to Toledo across the bay. Under this charter the C&T bridged the bay, then constructed track to the Southern Division (former TN&C) line at Millbury Junction, using its rails to reach Toledo. The first train ran from Cleveland to Toledo over the bay on April 24, 1855.

Times turned tough after the 1857 depression, and the tracks from Sandusky to near Millbury Junction were removed, since traffic wouldn't support them. Sanduskians had to make do with a stub track to the east. For points west, they had to take the S&I to the Southern Division of the C&T at Clyde. This sorry state of affairs persisted until 1868, when the C&T was swept up into the LS&MS, which would transform the Sandusky rail network. But that is a story for Part 2. NYC

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