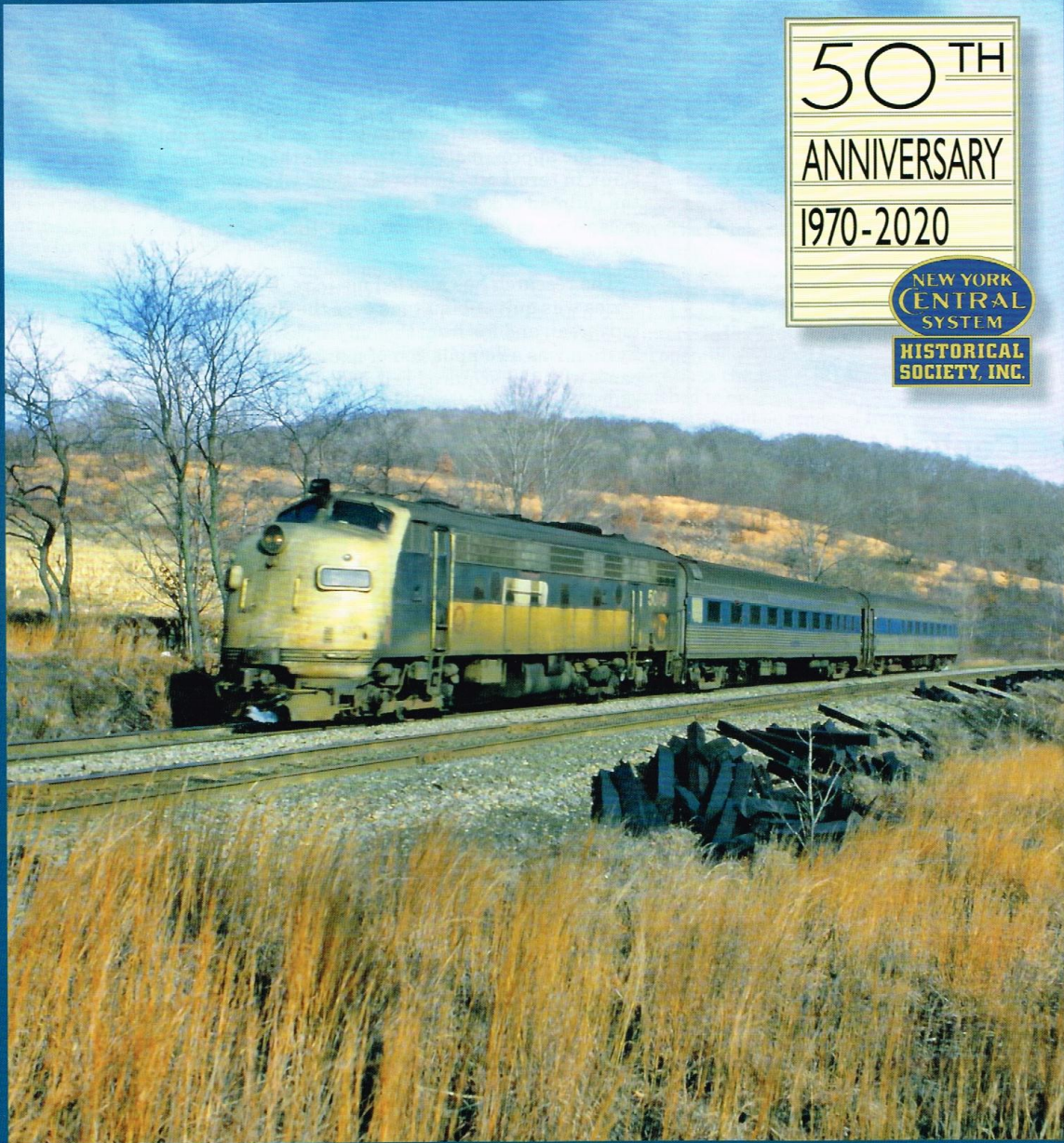




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Sandusky – In at the Beginning

Part 2

BY RON HELMECI

Sandusky, as far as its railroads were concerned, entered the Civil War era in an unenviable position. The Sandusky, Dayton & Cincinnati RR (SD&C, the former MR&LE), Sandusky's bet on capturing the Ohio Valley trade, not only suffered from years of underinvestment; its rates were under pressure from the CC&C, Cleveland's better financed link to Cincinnati, and much of the Ohio Valley trade was collapsing because of the war. If this wasn't enough, the SD&C was a north-south railroad in a rapidly developing east-west railroad world.

The driving force behind the rapid buildout of the east-west rail network in the Midwest was the quest to link burgeoning Chicago and the rapidly settling Trans-Mississippi to the East Coast. In this newly developing world, Sandusky, with its C&T Northern Division stub track to Cleveland, had the misfortune to be an east-only city. All through traffic completely bypassed Sandusky on the C&T Southern Division through Norwalk and Fremont. With little to show for twenty-five years of effort, Sandusky was in danger of being stood up at the dance.

The 1868 merger that swept the C&T and other roads into the newly formed LS&MS could have been a death blow to Sandusky. Had the LS&MS continued to use the Southern Division as its main line, Sandusky could very easily have withered on the vine. Fortunately, LS&MS corporate imperatives and basic geography came to the rescue and catapulted Sandusky overnight from a wallflower to a relative heavyweight.

The main corporate imperative at work here was the desire on the part of the LS&MS to create the shortest and fastest through route from Buffalo to Chicago. All else being equal, the shorter route would save time and money. While partially embargoed since 1858, the old C&T Northern Division route, from Cleveland to Toledo through Sandusky over the Bay Bridge, was several miles shorter than the C&T Southern Division. This led the LS&MS, in 1872, to rebuild and re-open the embargoed portion.

To improve traffic flow around Sandusky, the LS&MS built a 3.37 mile-long airline bypass to

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Caught in flight by company photographer Ed Nowak, No. 76, the eastbound Mercury, barrels across the Sandusky Bay Bridge at an unrecorded date. In moments the train will flash by Sandusky's depot in its haste to land passengers in Cleveland on the advertised. NYCSSH Archive Image PB507.019.



This view looks east on the 3.37-mile-long bypass constructed by the LS&MS to improve traffic flow at Sandusky. The freight house can be seen on left and the main freight yard on the right. The large factory of the American Crayon Company appears in the distance on the south side of the tracks. Collection of the author.

the south of downtown, so that through trains did not have to wend their way through the congested waterfront. This bypass began in the east near the Perkins township line at Sandusky Junction and re-connected to the Pier tracks at Bay Junction near the small settlement of Venice, about a half mile west of downtown Sandusky.

After completing the bypass, the LS&MS constructed a new main passenger station and separate freight facility on the north side of the tracks. Across from these they located a small classification yard where cars from the Pier tracks and from local industries could be sorted for shipment. Due to increased traffic, this yard was enlarged in the 1880s.

The original bypass passenger station was replaced by a new one in 1892 at the cost of \$30,000.



In this colorized, early 1900s postcard view, a Toledo-bound passenger train pauses at Sandusky. While mail and express is loaded and unloaded, the engineer takes care of his steed's needs. The power is one of the LS&MS's high-stepping 2-6-2 Prairies. Collection of the author.

Designed by the Boston firm of Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge, it was constructed by Adam Feick and Brothers, a reputable local construction company. A main depot and separate building for use by the REA were built from buff-colored Amherst limestone and then connected by a common roof made of Maine slate. The interior featured oak trim and oak wainscoting. Typical of the times, it had a ticket office, a telegraph station, and separate waiting rooms for men and women.

Several industries needing good rail service located on or relocated to the bypass. Probably the most interesting of these was the American Crayon Company, formed in 1890 through the merging of several companies, some of which dated back to 1835 in Massachusetts and 1850 in Sandusky. From a humble beginning making blackboard and tailor's chalk, the company expanded into supplying all types of art products for schools, including crayons. When the original factory burned in 1901, a new factory was built on the south side of the bypass, just to the east of the classification yard. Served exclusively by the NYC, it remained in operation until 2002, with the factory complex only recently being razed. For those readers who, long ago, may have wished to color favorite boxcar drawings with either NYC Jade Green or Pacemaker Red and Gray, there was probably nothing better for the job than the trusty old crayons produced in the American Art factory in Sandusky and shipped courtesy of the NYC.

Traffic would eventually increase to the extent that the bypass was triple-tracked within Sandusky.



LS&MS 10, an 1896 Schenectady graduate in old Class F, pauses eastbound at Sandusky in a photo that predates 1905, when this 4-6-0 was renumbered to LS&MS 5020. A Buster Keaton look-alike takes in the scene. Sandusky Public Library.

To get some sense of the number of daily trains that used this trackage, I will refer to a short write-up by Paul F. Laning set in 1938, eight years into the Great Depression.

When we moved to Sandusky in 1938, our town still had splendid passenger train connections east and west from

the station on North Depot Street. During any 24-hour period the New York Central scheduled ten west-bounds and nine east-bounds to stop in Sandusky. Altogether, sixteen westbound and sixteen eastbound passenger trains hastened through town, and railroad buffs enjoyed the sights in late summer nights when the NYC "fleet" paraded through at dusk and twilight. The NYC also had to provide an additional daily service for its freight train "symbol" operations, nine westbound and thirteen eastbound "fast freights."¹

The bypass also served the terminus of the Lake Erie & Western (LE&W), which, in 1881, was added to the roster of railroads serving Sandusky. Originally chartered in 1853 as the Fremont & Indiana, it managed to reach Celina, Ohio from Fremont, after many trials and tribulations, in 1879 under the somewhat aspirational name of the Lake Erie and Louisville Railroad (LE&L). At this point, Calvin S. Brice, one of the road's managers, conceived a plan that could potentially turn the LE&L into the core of a new trunk line. By completing a 54-mile connector link in 1880, Brice and the Seney Syndicate connected the LE&L to the La Fayette, Bloomington & Muncie RR (LB&M), which ran through its namesake cities, and then

(Continued on following page)



This view looks west along the three-track bypass from the American Crayon Company building, on the left. NYCSHS Archive Image PB505.043.

1. Laning, Paul F. Unpublished note. Sandusky Public Library.

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consolidated them into the LE&W.

For two reasons, Brice and his partner Foster were not satisfied with Fremont as the northern terminus. Fremont, located about 25 miles southwest of Sandusky, was an "inland" port city located both at the head of navigation on the Sandusky River and also on the old C&T Southern Division of the LS&MS. Due to heavy silting, it required constant dredging to keep the port open. Also, traffic through Fremont had declined substantially after the LS&MS began diverting traffic over the newly rebuilt tracks through Sandusky.

In 1880, Brice and Foster allied the LE&W with the Vanderbilt lines and the Chicago & Alton (C&A) to form a fast-freight line from Boston to Kansas City. While the LS&MS and the LE&W already met at Fremont, Brice and Foster preferred that the two lines meet at Sandusky. Work commenced immediately on a new track between Fremont and Sandusky, using the old right-of-way of the defunct Ohio Railroad. To help finance the extension, Sandusky provided a grant of \$60,000. Construction was completed by late 1880. The LE&W tracks paralleled the SD&C to the east into Sandusky, then turned east to run parallel to the bypass track, stopping just before reaching the LS&MS classification yard. There the LE&W built a roundhouse, a few other facilities, and a small classification yard which fed directly into the LS&MS's yard and allowed all points in Sandusky to be reached (see Sandusky Map).

By the time the LE&W began running trains

into Sandusky in February of 1881, the railroad landscape had already shifted dramatically. When Vanderbilt antagonized the Seney Syndicate by attempting to join forces with Jay Gould and the Wabash, they retaliated by beginning construction on the Nickel Plate. While Brice continued on his own to expand the reach of the LE&W, at his death in 1898 the LS&MS purchased a majority holding and took over operations. From 1900 until it was sold to the Nickel Plate in 1922, the LE&W became little more than a feeder to the LS&MS. After the sale the Nickel Plate diverted all traffic south of Fostoria onto their line, leaving the segment from Fostoria to Sandusky to serve local traffic.

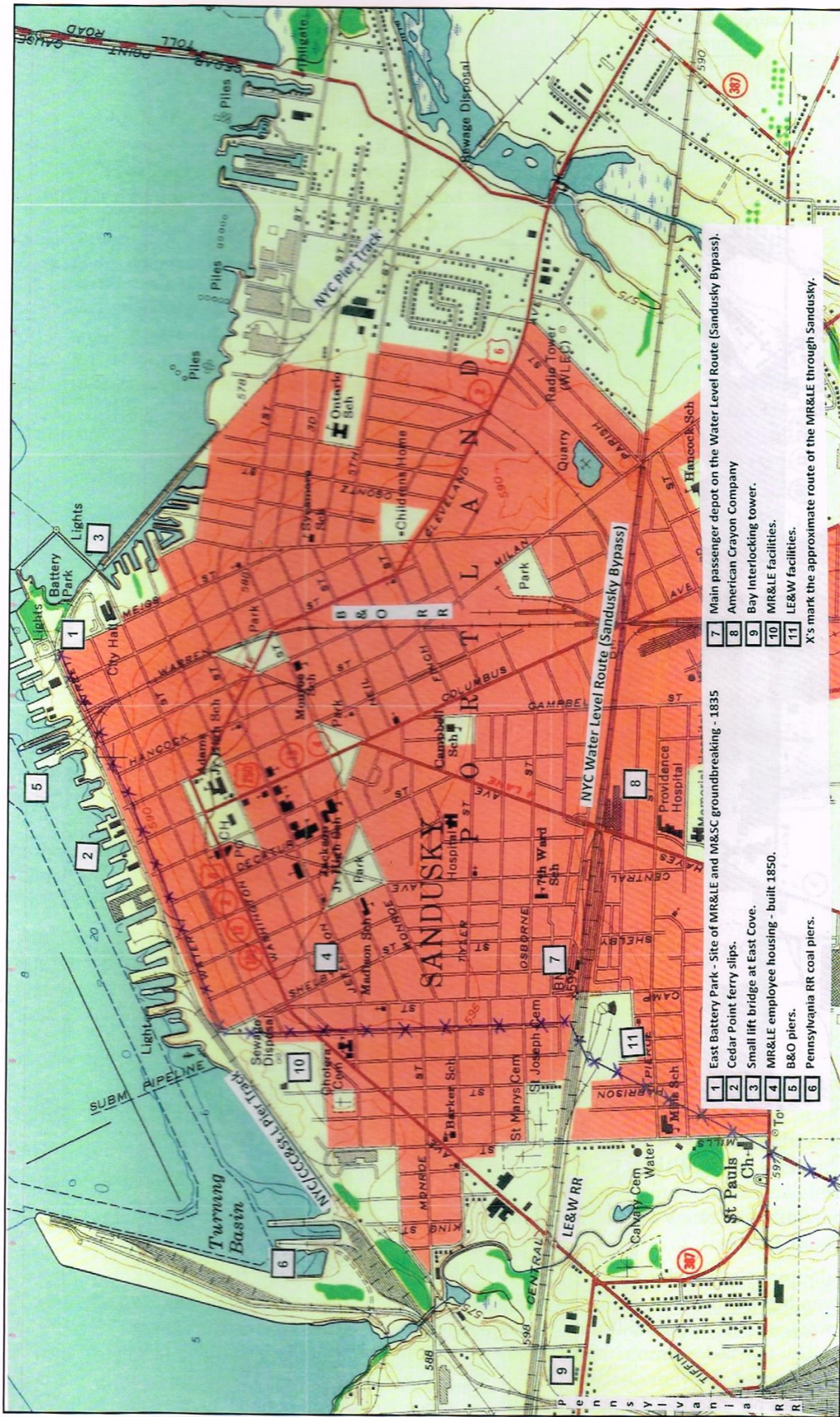
One last component of the Sandusky rail scene, with an indirect relationship to the MR&LE, was the Columbus & Sandusky, Lake Erie & Southern Short Line RR (C&SLE&SSL), chartered in 1889. "Lake Erie and Southern" was dropped from the name in 1891, shortly after construction began. Built to Columbus with 97 percent straight track, this line used the old MR&LE right-of-way from Sandusky to Bellevue and terminated within Sandusky at the Big Four depot. Sandusky contributed \$75,000 to defray the cost of docks and slips that were dredged out and built at the end of King Street to receive coal vessels. Service to Columbus began in 1893. Despite being well-built, the road wasn't strong enough to support its heavy debt load. After a series of receiverships, it was taken over by the Pennsylvania Railroad, which used it as its primary route from the Pocahontas coal fields to the Great Lakes, thereby cementing Sandusky's role as the second largest coal shipper on the Great Lakes.

With all the track in place, it is time to consider how it was put to use hauling freight and passengers. Despite the construction of the bypass, through most of the LS&MS's years and probably well into the 1930's, the majority of traffic was generated on the Pier tracks. The city produced an immense amount of standard freight, including limestone aggregate and blocks, wood products, paper, and farm produce. More unusual goods included natural ice, freshwater fish, fruit, wines and beer, and the aforementioned crayons. Of these, the natural ice industry probably produced the most volume of freight. On the passenger side, by

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Lake Erie & Western 2-8-0 5329, a Class G-44 locomotive built by Brooks in 1904, bats No. 66, a daily LE&W westbound hotshot, past Bay Tower. A vintage string of truss-rodded reefers and boxcars follows. The fireman ponders who this man with a camera might be. Photo by Ernst Niebergall. Charles E. Frohman Collection/Hayes Presidential Center.



This annotated detail from USGS Quad Map Sandusky Ohio 1959 shows the NYC and CCC&St. L tracks that surround Sandusky. The NYC Pier track left the Water Level Route (the Sandusky Bypass) just to the east of Sandusky, reaching the waterfront at Battery Park. From there both the NYC and Big Four tracks paralleled the downtown waterfront before reconnecting with the Bypass near Bay Interlocking tower just to the west of Sandusky. In the process, NYCS tracks formed a complete ring around the majority of the city.



LS&MS 441, a home-built, four-wheel tank engine dating back to 1872, was switching at Sandusky sometime before her scrapping in 1895. Climbing into this locomotive's commodious cab did not require much effort. Ray Curl Collection, NYCSHS Archive Image PB626.145.



The Big Four's presence in Sandusky is represented here by CCC&St. L 7216, an 0-6-0 switch engine constructed for the Cincinnati, Sandusky and Cleveland Railroad by the Rome Locomotive Works in 1889. Sandusky Public Library.

charters, specials, and regularly scheduled trains, the LS&MS and the NYC brought their fair share of the hordes of tourists and excursionists who flocked to Sandusky each summer to enjoy Lake Erie's "Vacationland" and Cedar Point.

Before the development of mechanical refrigeration, natural ice was big business at Sandusky, the largest producer west of the Appalachians. While the business actually started around 1852, peak production roughly spanned the years between 1875 and 1890 but continued on into the 1920s. In good

years, up to 400,000 tons of ice were extracted from the bay and either sent for storage in one of the fifty ice houses lining the bay or else loaded directly into freight cars for shipment. During the peak of the harvest season, as many as five hundred boxcars of ice per day would leave Sandusky. Assuming the average boxcar of the day was rated at 20 tons, up to 20,000 boxcars filled with ice would leave the city in a season. All this ice was harvested and processed by hundreds of the fishermen, sailors, and farmers in the region with time on their hands in the winter.

Sandusky Bay's shallowness, which sometimes hindered its usefulness as a port, helped make it ideal for the harvesting of ice. With a depth of a mere three to four feet in many places, the bay froze over very quickly during cold snaps. Once the ice was thick enough, harvesting began on an industrial scale using a very simple process. First, a grid was scored on the ice using a horse-drawn iron cutter. Using these as a guide, the ice was sawn and/or split into fairly uniform chunks. These were floated into a channel which led to the base of a conveyor system which lifted the ice from the water and then directed it into an ice house, where it was stacked for storage, or moved directly into boxcars for shipment.

Wages were good for this seasonal work. Around 1900, those doing the actual harvesting on the lake made \$2.00 for a 10-hour day, whereas those stowing the ice in boxcars made \$3.75, and car pickers made \$2.00. By comparison, switch tenders made \$1.75.

There were myriad customers for the ice but the two largest users outside of Sandusky were probably the slaughterhouses of Cincinnati and Chicago and the breweries of St. Louis, all accessible over NYC lines. Locally, ice was used for the shipment of fish and produce to market and for the production of beer in the local breweries, much of which was shipped out by rail.

Despite its struggles with pollution and agricultural runoff, a struggle that continues, western Lake Erie is possibly the most bountiful freshwater fishery in the world. Today the domain of sport fishermen seeking walleye and perch, from the 1850s to the early 1900s Sandusky was the center of a huge commercial fishing industry and the largest freshwater fish market in the world. While fishing has been done since time immemorial in western Lake Erie, com-



This quintet of photos depicts five of the several processes that brought considerable revenue to Vanderbilt coffers from Sandusky's ice-harvesting business. They demonstrate using a horse-drawn steel scoring device to mark out the blocks of ice, sawing the blocks, floating the blocks in a channel to the ice house (note the wintering Cedar Point steamers), feeding the blocks into an ice house, and loading the blocks into a boxcar. Sandusky Public Library.



In the early 1900s, Sandusky was at the center of a huge fishing industry, with up to eight carloads of fish leaving the city daily in season. Less desirable fish were also processed into fertilizer or oil, as seen here at the Jarecki Chemical Company. Sandusky Public Library.

mercial fishing began to increase rapidly in the mid-1800s, thanks both to the arrival of railroads to provide easy access to markets and the use of bigger and better nets.

By the 1870s the catch of fish was in the thousands of tons, with whitefish, saugers, catfish, herring, and perch leading the harvest of "hard" fishes desired by domestic markets. By the 1880s Sandusky had "nine large dealers and processors of fresh, salted and frozen fish"² and on average during the November to April shipping season, "eight carloads of fish left the city each day."³ This business continued to thrive for decades, although by the 1920s Sandusky had lost its lead.

In addition to being the largest freshwater fishery, Sandusky was the center of the American caviar trade. Sturgeon were one of the most abundant fish in the lake but were considered so worthless that they were sometimes burned for fuel in early steamships. Recognizing an opportunity, in 1867 Simeon and John Schacht left their family caviar business in Chester, Pennsylvania and set up the first caviar factory on the Great Lakes on the docks at the foot of Fulton Street. Competitors rushed in and the business blossomed to such an extent that by the 1880s production involved processing 50,000 sturgeon a year, which produced 1,500 125-pound kegs of caviar.

At this time, Freuchnicht & Nielsen, the largest manufacturers, had a branch in Germany. This branch, along with the LS&MS, were critical elements in the success and profitability of the caviar trade. To the caviar snobs of the period, Lake Erie caviar

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2. Frohman, Charles E., *Sandusky's Yesterdays*, The Ohio Historical Society, 1968, p. 128.

3. Frohman, p. 128.

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did not possess the cachet of the European variety. To get around this image problem, bulk caviar was packed in barrels, then shipped first to New York City and then to Germany. Once repackaged into glass jars with German labels, it was re-exported back to the US to be sold at a hefty premium.

The Junction Railroad (JRR) and the LS&MS were also intimately involved in a third leg of the fishing business in Sandusky, the processing of offal into fertilizer. The by-product of processing thousands of tons of fish a year was a lot of fish offal and a major league disposal problem. To make use of this waste, Bachrach, Pincus & Company built a factory in 1867 on the east side of the Junction tracks on First Street, an area soon to become notorious as "Pincusville." There the offal, as well as "trash" fish such as sheepshead and carp, were steam-cooked in large vats until jellified. Then the fish oil was separated out and the remainder was kiln dried into guano. Weekly production of guano soon reached 300 to 400 ten ton barrels a week, which were mainly shipped to Hamburg, Germany via New York City. This process also yielded as many as thirty barrels of fish oil a week. This firm also processed caviar. Instead of shipping it to Germany to be repackaged and labeled, theirs went to Russia.

One by-product of processing offal, an awful stench of epic proportions, didn't go unnoticed by local residents and gained Pincusville its notoriety. In 1871, the firm's new owner, J. A. Camp, was prosecuted several times for creating a nuisance. Found guilty, he was ordered to fix the problem within ninety days. While historical records don't document the degree to which he may have succeeded, the LS&MS cleared the air in 1873 when a spark from one of its locomotives burned the place to the ground.



The shipment of bottled wine from Sandusky brought additional revenue to the New York Central. Here wine is brought to Sandusky for bottling by horsepower across the ice from a nearby island. Photo by Ernst Niebergall. Charles E. Frohman Collection/Hayes Presidential Center.

While this stopped the processing, it didn't stop the production of the offal. The expedient of dumping it in the bay near the docks came to prove less than satisfactory, especially on hot summer days. As a better solution, the Jarecki Chemical Company built a new fertilizer factory at Pincusville in 1887, producing five to six thousand tons of fish fertilizer a year. This business lasted until 1964.

Today, when one thinks of domestic wineries, California, not Ohio, comes to mind. But from 1850 to Prohibition, which wrecked the industry in the state, Ohio was the largest or second largest producer of wine in the country. Sandusky produced more than its fair share. Unlike California wines that used varieties imported from Europe, the Ohio industry was based on production from native American grapes such as the Catawba and the Niagara. The Sandusky wine region encompassed the Catawba Peninsula on the north side of Sandusky Bay, the Bass and Kelley's islands, as well as the vineyards and wineries of the remainder of Ottawa and Erie counties. In a reprise of the industry, circa 1888, it was estimated that two and a half million gallons were produced in the region annually. At twelve pounds of grapes to a gallon, this implies about 30 million pounds of grapes grown in the area on six thousand acres in vineyards. Most of this wine was shipped by rail throughout the interior. Champagne was also produced in abundance and mainly sold in the South.

Besides grapes for wine, another three to four million pounds of table and culinary grapes were grown and shipped out by rail. These were joined by carloads of apples, peaches, and other fruits which flourished on the Catawba Peninsula and in the Sandusky area due to the moderating influence of Lake Erie on the local climate.

With respect to passenger traffic, while Sandusky enjoyed superb service on the Water Level Route and the Big Four, the real story here was the immense passenger traffic generated by people flocking to enjoy Lake Erie's Vacationland. Sandusky was the destination where presidents to paupers came, mostly by rail, to enjoy the beaches, fishing, wineries, beer halls, and other attractions on the south shore of Lake Erie, the Lake Erie islands, and the Catawba Peninsula. Cedar Point, a watering hole built at the tip of the peninsula forming the eastern end of Sandusky Bay, became the Queen of them all and rivaled Coney Island and Atlantic City.

The resort movement was a post-Civil War phenomenon. The middle class that was emerging had just enough money and free time to enjoy brief stays at budget hotels, usually located on the ocean or

lakeshore. The best of these, such as at Coney Island or Atlantic City, offered beach access and swimming as well as other activities. Part and parcel were the rail access and budget excursions which allowed people to easily reach the resorts from a fairly wide area.

The East Coast resorts were out-of-reach for most Midwesterners, who looked around and saw that the south shore of Lake Erie and its islands made a perfect summer vacation area for the masses. Put-in-Bay, on South Bass Island, from which location Commodore Perry fought the Battle of Lake Erie, became the first such place in the 1860s. Hotels were opened, and soon beer gardens, restaurants, and other diversions followed. Most of the patrons would arrive by rail at Sandusky's Pier track and transfer to steamboats to make the trip to the islands and stay for a few days. The beer gardens appealed to the many Midwesterners of Germany heritage, while the beaches and amusements appealed to families.

The Bass Islands were not only for the common man. President Hayes lived only a few miles away in Fremont and owned Mouse Island, just off the tip of Catawba Island. Jay Cooke returned to construct a lovely residence on Middle Bass Island (now housing the Ohio State Fresh Water research station). John D. Rockefeller and Henry Flagler would take time off from minting money in Cleveland to enjoy the sights. As a result, the area became a go-to destination for presidents, industrialists, and other well-known figures. Lakeside, on the north side of the Catawba Peninsula, became a Methodist retreat and Chautauqua, drawing thousands every summer.

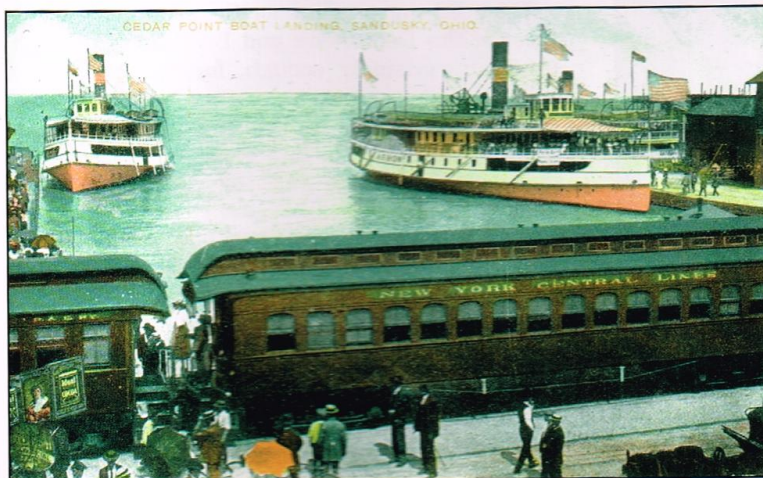
The northeastern side of Sandusky Bay is formed by the Cedar Point Peninsula, which is very narrow where it attaches to land and widens as it extends out into the lake. Since storms would routinely wash out parts of the peninsula near shore, the only reliable access to the broad area near the tip was by water. Early on it was a place for squatters, fishermen, and others with nowhere else to go. However, with miles of pristine beaches and easy access to Sandusky by a short steamboat ride, its potential as a resort did not escape the notice of the residents of Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan looking for a fine place to spend a few days.

Cedar Point's ascendancy began around 1870 when Louis Zistel opened a small beer garden with a dance floor, and also set up a small bathhouse and entertainments for the kids. While popular, it did not reopen, and development was delayed until 1882 when Benjamin Dwelle and Captain William Slackford saw the potential and installed a dance hall, bathing facilities, a beer garden, landscaping, and walkways. All that was required to get there was a 25-cent boat ride from downtown Sandusky, and the place began to prosper. In the first season attendance reached 1,000 a day, with most arriving in Sandusky by train.

In 1888 management changed again and Charles Baetz, the new general manager, introduced band concerts and vaudeville, along with a grand new pavilion and arcade, electric lighting, and more. At this time the first amusement rides were also added, with the first roller coaster built in 1892. Railroad excursions brought more and more people, with attendance reaching 6,000 a day, as the resort's reputation spread. All that was needed were world-class hotels to truly turn it into a resort rivaling the best the east had to offer.

This need was met in 1897 when George A. Boeckling, a successful businessman with little experience in resorts, arrived to begin the transformation that would see Cedar Point become the "Queen of Resorts." He saw that hotel facilities were needed to compete for the convention trade as well as for those seeking longer stays. He also saw the potential in the amusement park side of the business and started to build that. In 1905 he opened

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Excursionists came from the many corners of the New York Central lines to enjoy the delights of Sandusky's Cedar Point. Here passengers disembark from open-platform coaches to board steamers for the passage to the point. This train may have originated on the P&E, as indicated on the letterboard of the coach on the left. Collection of the author.

Sandusky... (Continued from page 33)

the magnificent, 600-room Breakers Hotel, and it was an immediate hit. It not only brought prosperity back to the resort but it served as a magnet for the wealthy and famous. Over the years Presidents Taft, Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, Roosevelt, and Eisenhower stayed, as did John Philip Sousa, Annie Oakley, Tyrone Powers, Sherwood Anderson, and John D. Rockefeller. Combined with the opening of a 90,000-square-foot dance and entertainment complex dubbed the Coliseum, along with new rides and restaurants, Cedar Point's future was assured.

Boeckling was astute enough to know that how people got to the resort was nearly as important as what the resort would offer once they arrived. To this end he encouraged direct lake service from Detroit, Toledo, and Cleveland by steamer. As David and Diane Francis explain,

it was Boeckling who exploited the rail services to their fullest degree. He lavishly entertained railroad officials and constantly negotiated for increased excursion service from all parts of Ohio, Michigan and Indiana. Recognizing the profits to be made from excursions, railroader management responded by adding trains, promoting excursion rates and even printing large Cedar Point advertisements in their timetables. On a typical Sunday in 1911, a Big Four train offered service from Cincinnati, a Lake Erie & Western from Indianapolis and two Pennsylvania Railroad sections from Columbus. In addition, regular rail service to Sandusky was available on the New York Central, Nickel Plate, Lake

Shore & Michigan Southern and Baltimore & Ohio roads. With railroads offering round-trip excursion rates for as low as \$1.00, the special trains were well patronized, and on one busy Sunday in 1908, sixteen passenger trains filled the spurs near the resort's Sandusky docks. Railway excursions became so popular that even the unions that represented the employees began using Cedar Point for their annual summer outings, and at least one railroad association continued patronizing Cedar Point for over 60 years.⁴

The "railroad association" was the Lake Shore Pioneer Chapter – New York Central Veterans, an organization for current and retired employees of the New York Central System. Each year, several thousand members would gather at Cedar Point to spend the day, with a banquet in the evening. After each outing, a seven-inch commemorative plate was issued.

In addition to excursions, conventions and outings for a day to a week were very popular. The Francises continue, "Typical of these was the Employee's Picnic of Akron's Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company which first visited the resort in 1914, with 3,100 people. Two years later, the picnic had become so large that it required 130 railroad cars traveling in ten sections to transport the employees and their families to the resort."⁵

By 1915, attendance was approaching one million visitors during the three months from Labor Day to Memorial Day, with most coming by train. This equates to roughly 10,000 visitors a day to Sandusky, which had a population of about 20,000 at the time. Growth continued through the 1920s, although more and more patrons chose to arrive by auto or by the network of interurban lines that ran to Sandusky.

The good times ended for Cedar Point with the onset of the Depression and Boeckling's death in 1931. Surprisingly enough, for once the steam railroads came out the winners for the attendees that remained. The hard times finished off the interurban lines and the lake steamers. Auto ownership stagnated, and even those who did own autos couldn't always afford gas and tires. As a result, the cheap excursions and conventions continued to bring large numbers of visitors in, especially after Prohibition was repealed. One noteworthy event was the B. F. Goodrich Company outing in 1935, when a crowd of 40,000 was expected. "Many of the Akronites arrived in six train sections of fourteen passenger cars each."⁶



The image of a Mercury locomotive was featured on this plate issued to commemorate the 1937 gathering of the Lake Shore Pioneer Chapter - New York Central Veterans at Cedar Point. Collection of the author.

4. Francis, David W. and Francis, Diane DeMali, *Cedar Point, The Queen of American Watering Places*, Daring Books, Canton, Ohio, 1988. pp. 56-57.

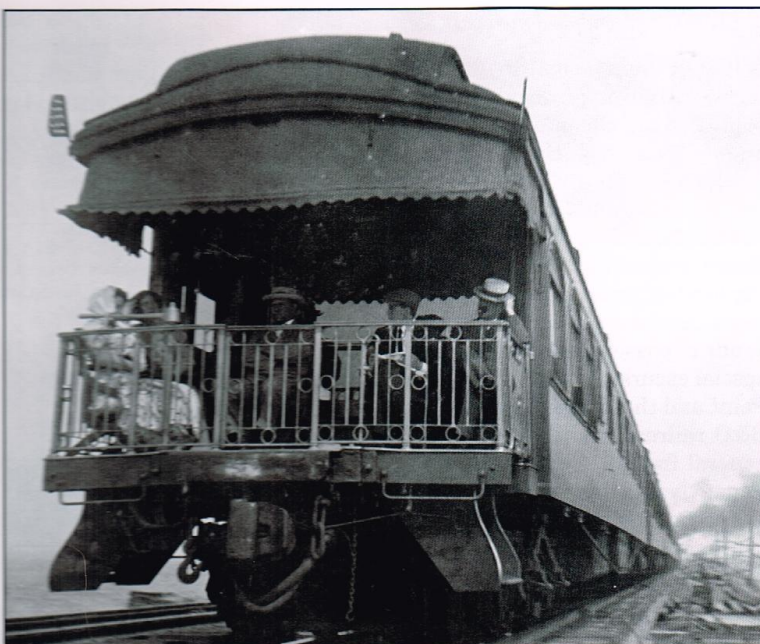
5. Francis, p. 57.

6. Francis, p. 87.

WWII nearly finished off Cedar Point and effectively ended the railroad excursions. While Cedar Point was resurrected after World War II to become the roller-coaster capital of the world, the rail industry entered a period of retrenchment and contraction. The Pier tracks were no longer needed and were eventually removed or paved over after the war. The B&O maintained service to its piers until 1973, but it, the Big Four, and the LE&W are but memories. Today Norfolk Southern operates the coal docks and the ex-Water Level tracks through the city, sharing the bypass with Amtrak. While it's not what it was in the early 1900s, Sandusky is still home to serious railroading.

This is a good place to step back and reflect briefly on the scope and scale of rail operations at their

(Continued on following page)



Returning homeward, Cedar Point excursionists enjoy the rearward view as their train rolls westward across the Sandusky Bay Bridge. Photo by Ernst Niebergall. Charles E. Frohman Collection/Hayes Presidential Center.



In a 1940s view, L-2c Mohawk 2833 moves eastward freight through Sandusky. NYCSHS Archive Image PB603.106.

Sandusky... (Continued from page 35)

height in the era circa 1910. At that time Sandusky had a footprint of about nine square miles and a population of about 20,000. Within this footprint, on any given day, the NYC was sending dozens of crack passenger and other trains through the city on the Water Level Route bypass. On the Pier tracks, within the seven-block-long stretch of Railroad Street waterfront, three railroads were busy serving lumber yards, fish houses, ice houses, and other piers. At the same time, on these same tracks, thousands of passengers, during the summer, arrived on special excursion trains to catch steamboats to Cedar Point and the Erie Islands. One block to the east the B&O railroad maintained three piers for grain and general freight. Just to the west of downtown, the Pennsylvania maintained huge rail yards for coal trains waiting to load lake freighters. Sandusky was a tangle of trackage and railroad facilities, steam lines, and interurbans, switch tracks, yards, docks, and factories, difficult to conceptualize today.

Despite Sandusky's embrace of the railroads, she never achieved parity with her rivals, Cleveland and Toledo. Jay Cooke had some interesting thoughts on this.

The canal scheme failed, the people selected the lumber industries instead of the iron trade, which swiftly contributed to the growth of a great city at Cleveland, sixty miles farther east on the lake front, where there was a harbor of much less natural worth; the cholera in 1849 and 1852, brought into the town by emigrants, was wrongly and with damage attributed to unwholesome local conditions; and altogether Sandusky defeated the expectations of the more ambitious of its first inhabitants. Moreover, its people lacked the helpful, cooperative, metropolitan spirit of the men who made Cleveland what that place is to-day, and have many times stood in the way of their own advancement."⁷

But at the end of the day, the railroads, most especially those associated with the New York Central, kept Sandusky in the game and helped make it the charming city it is today. (NYC)

7. Oberholtzer, Ellis Paxson, *Jay Cooke, Financier of the Civil War*, George W. Jacobs & Co., Philadelphia, 1907, p. 29.



It's November 4, 1937, and J-1d Hudson 5295 digs in as she departs Sandusky with a westbound passenger train that is heavy with head-end equipment. NYCSHS Archive Image PB038.051