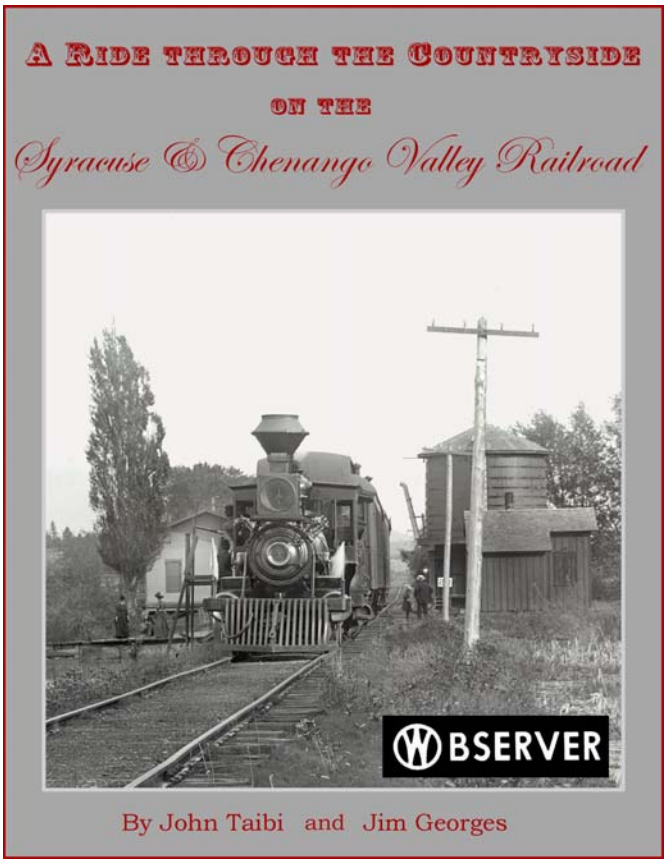
An Introduction to the Chenango Branch,
and the *Vexing Question of the Tunnel's Vent*

Number 97 in a Series
By John Taibi



Don't bother looking for a branch of this name on an NYO&WRy system map; you won't find one. Yet, the route of this New York Central Railroad branch line nearly became the mainline of the New York & Oswego Midland Railroad and, later, the O&W by default. The story about how this all came about is an interesting tale that dates back to the post-Civil War days of railroad fever in central New York, and will be the subject of your **Observer** publication for the calendar year 2009. This **Observer**, entitled ***A Ride Through the Countryside on the Syracuse & Chenango Valley*** will be 240 pages in length containing 306 photographs, maps, and illustrations. The purpose of this installment of the NDB&BDept is two-fold as the above title implies; an introduction to the book, and the mysterious story about the possibility of a vent in the Chenango's tunnel.

I desired to write about the Syracuse & Chenango Valley Railroad for quite some time, but it seemed that doing so remained a back-burner project for a handful of years. Then, a chance meeting of Erieville resident Jim Georges finally lit a new – and more powerful – fire that launched the undertaking into motion. It was only natural for Jim to have a degree of interest in the Chenango Branch as its old line passed along the back boundary of his Erieville property. He knew that the railroad had run there at one time, but knew little of the line's history. I knew a little more than he, but not much more than its route was the way the Midland had wished to build its line in the late 1860s. So, we combined our interests and talents in learning more about the railroad and, since it seems the best way to find out something about anything is to have the desire to write a book, we dove headlong into microfilm of old newspaper stories, interviewing village and county historians – as well as local folks who had some connection to the railroad, and strove to locate textual and photographic material. The latter took us to local historical societies and all the way to the New York Public Library in New York City, as well as the National Archives branch office in College Park, Maryland.

What we came to realize was that there was a substantial amount of surviving documentation and photographic evidence of the Chenango Branch's onetime presence, and that the memory of the 44 mile line was still alive and well in the minds of lifelong residents who lived along its Earlville-Syracuse right-of-way in the upland communities southwest of Syracuse that the coming of the S&CV – and its

descendents – had caused to become more prosperous. The more we researched and investigated, the more we knew that working on a book about this line was a worthy endeavor; we also developed a bonding friendship and a deep appreciation for the other's participation in the project. Working on this book was not a chore, it was fun. The smoldering back-burner idea moved rapidly to the front of the stove where an abundant flame boiled the project into life.

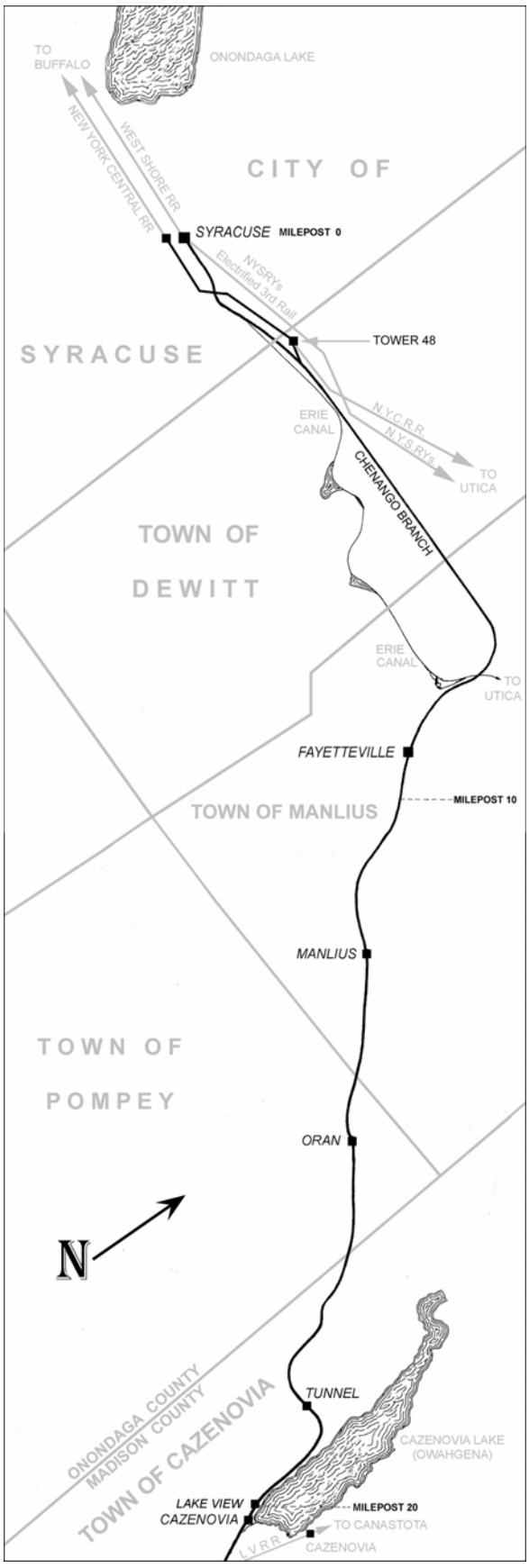
While you'll have to wait until the **Observer** arrives in your mailbox for the complete story, Jim and I couldn't wait any longer to provide you with a sampling of what we found out about the life of the S&CV and its transformation into a branch of the New York Central Railroad, if for no other reason than to whet your interest and expectation for the eventual publication of ***A Ride Through the Countryside on the Syracuse & Chenango Valley Railroad*.** The book will be a satisfyingly delicious 5-course meal; this article is just the appetizer.

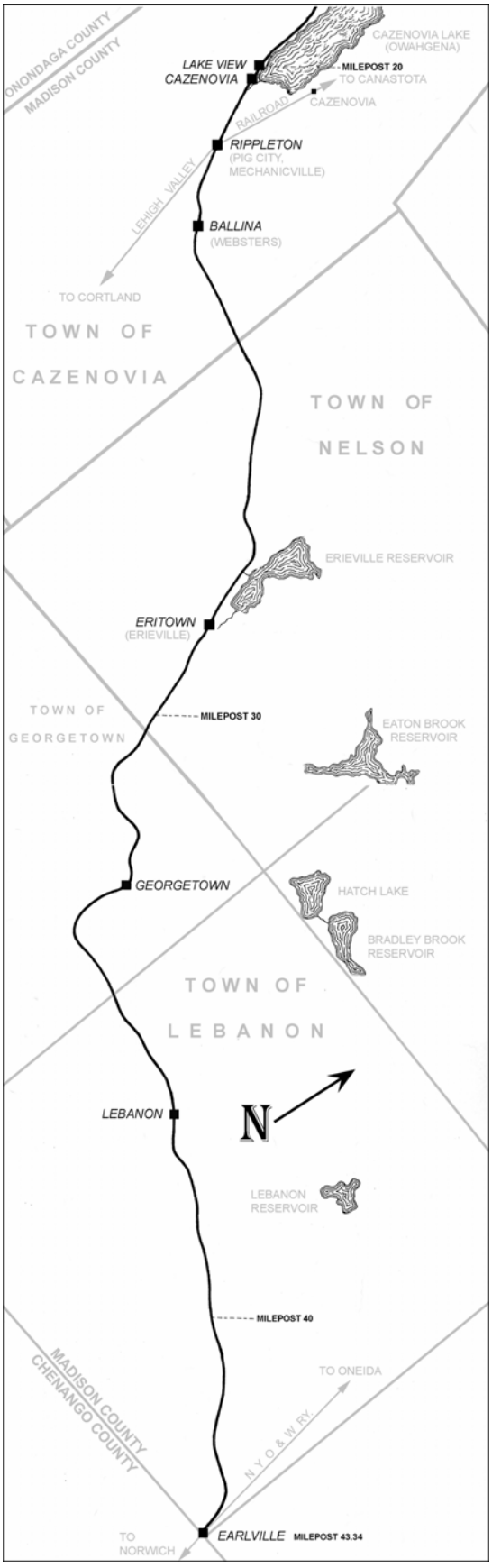
By 1867, the New York & Oswego Midland Railroad had substantially located its proposed route through central New York, and had held at least one meeting in each of the townships along its line. Midland President Littlejohn was an effective and persuasive orator at these gatherings and it wasn't long before the townships of Lebanon, Georgetown, Nelson, Cazenovia, and Manlius had agreed to provide construction aid (town bonding) to bring the railroad from Earlville to Syracuse via the communities of Lebanon, Georgetown, Erieville, Webster's, Cazenovia, Oran, Manlius, and Fayetteville. But, Littlejohn had difficulty in securing aid from Syracuse who saw no need to have another railroad intruding upon its streets, especially if it had to pay $750,000 to secure the railroad's route. When the Midland reduced its aid request by nearly $100,000, its advances were again rebuffed by Syracuse's city leaders. At this juncture, Littlejohn altered the course of the railroad's line so that none of the above towns and villages would receive his railroad. Instead, a new line struck out from Earlville that ran northerly to Oneida, thence around the north shore of Oneida Lake and intersected the original line immediately south of Fulton. In this manner, the railroad was brought to places such as Morrisville, Munnsville, and Sylvan Beach whereas it would not have if Syracuse had been forthcoming with cash for construction. Imagine that. An O&W railroad without a Munns depot!

Syracuse had been content with its snubbing of the Midland, at least until the railroad negotiated a contract with the Delaware & Hudson Canal Company to provide coal to its lineside communities as well as to the port of Oswego for lake shipment to other points. Since Syracuse needed coal, too, to maintain its industrial standing and promote increased prosperity, it realized it may have made a mistake in not welcoming the Midland to its streets. So, what did Syracuse do? It eventually aided the building of the Syracuse & Chenango Valley and Syracuse Northern railroads to the tune of $500,000, EACH! So, for a cool $1 million bucks they received substantially the same Earlville to Oswego route they would have gotten from the Midland for $600,000 and change. But, at least they would get the coal they desired, and the Midland was happy to have their business – and give them the business – all at the same time.

The route of the Syracuse & Chenango Valley Railroad was located principally upon the surveys undertaken previously by the NY&OM, but it did not receive all the support that the Midland would have enjoyed – Syracuse aside. The Town of Lebanon did not act to provide construction aid because it had already contributed funds to help construct the Midland along its new route. This despite the S&CV line

The Route of the Syracuse & Chenango Valley Railroad

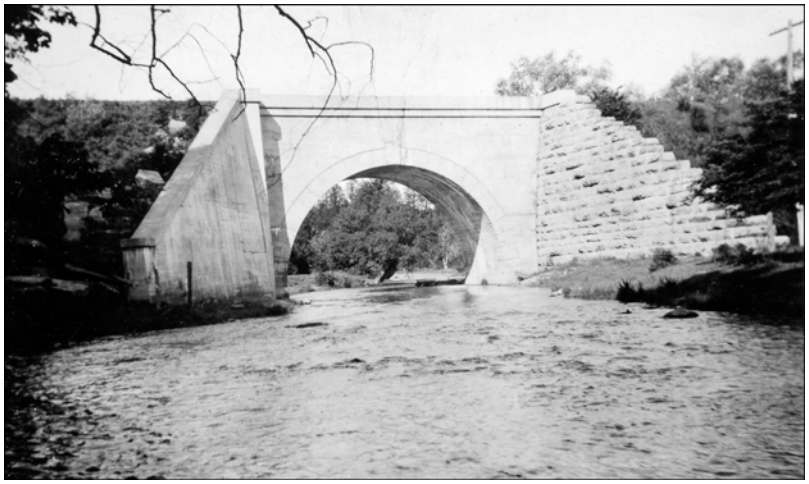




being located so that it nearly bisected the town and ran through its namesake community. The Midland's new route only touched a portion of the township. Similarly, Cazenovia had no interest in the S&CV either. It had lost its enthusiasm for a direct line to Syracuse when that city cast the Midland off, and it felt betrayed by the railroad as well. Since it still desired rail communication with the outside world, it instigated the formation, construction, and completion of the Cazenovia & Canastota Railroad to connect upland Cazenovia with lowland Canastota where the line met the New York Central. Thus, when the S&CV came calling at Cazenovia for construction aid only deaf ears and empty pockets were offered by the upscale community. Cazenovia, however, would still be one of the S&CV's three crown jewels; the other two being Manlius and Fayetteville. The crown's crest, of course, was the Salt City – Syracuse.

Construction of the S&CV commenced on June 8, 1870, and nearly three years later the line was completed. Within its 44-mile route, depots were put into operation at all of the principal communities, some of which were existing stores, buildings, or barns. At Earlville, the Midland's large board and batten depot became a union station, and a tender terminal consisting of a turntable and 2-stall roundhouse rounded out the railroad's southern terminus facilities. Syracuse received a small depot, a somewhat larger roundhouse, shop building, and a meager yard, all of which were economically provided and scaled for the foreseen needs of the new railroad.

During the Chenango's early years, the original Cazenovia depot (left) looks on as a ladies group prepares to board the cars. These were the days when pretty gals, petticoats, and parasols were all the rage. So was riding the train to Syracuse. One of the Chenango's more formidable bridges was E-26 (below) that allowed the railroad to cross over the Chittenango Creek immediately north of Rippleton. Its east profile was photographed on June 11, 1918. The masonry and stone structure shown here replaced an earlier wooden span. All Chenango bridge numbers were prefixed by an E.
Collections of Russell A. Grills and the National Archives.



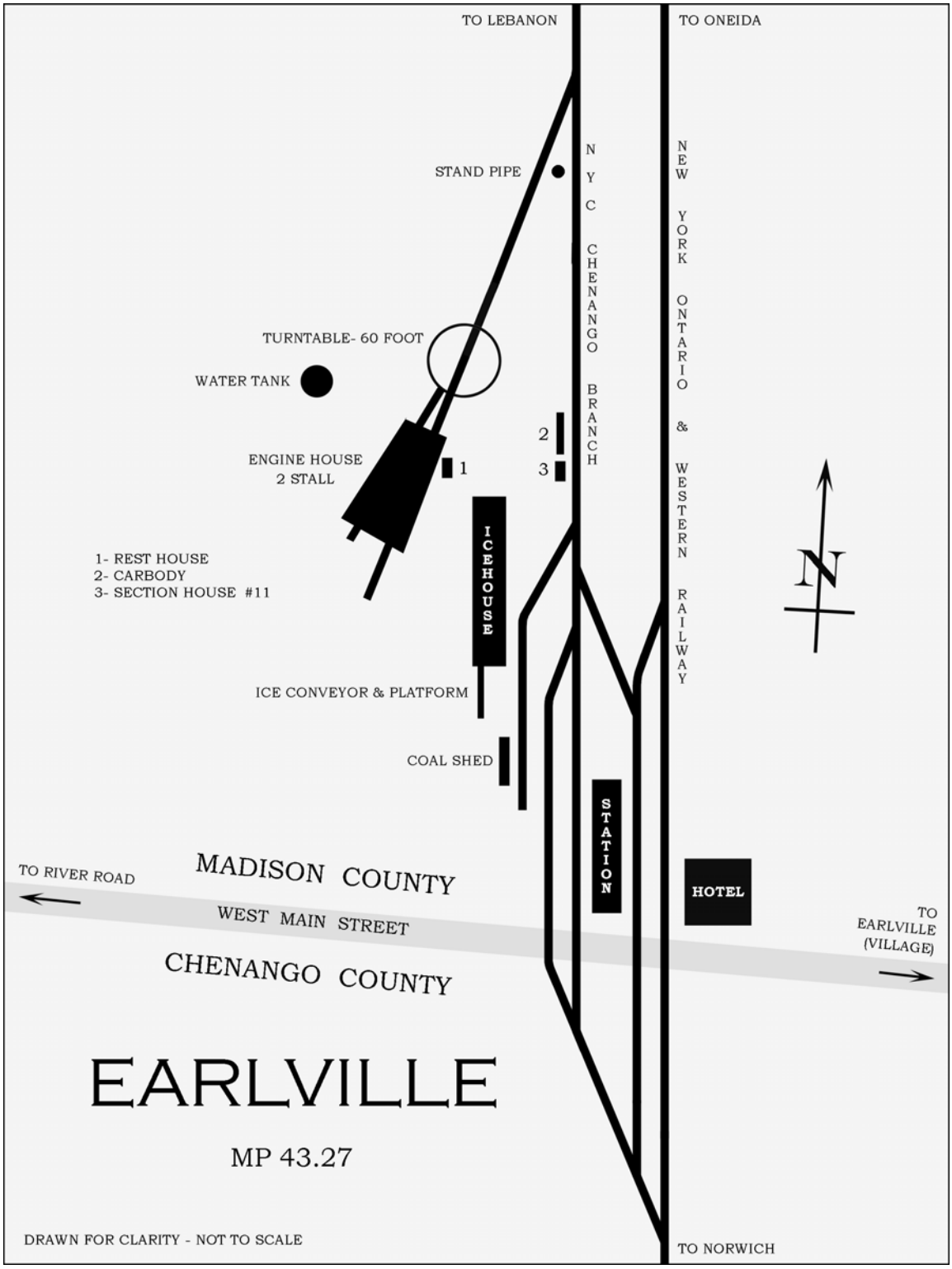
Along with the terminal and depot facilities, over 175 bridges were erected. The most noteworthy were overcrossings of the New York Central (passenger line to/from Syracuse), Limestone Creek and the Erie Canal near Fayetteville, and a magnificent span over Chittenango Creek south of Cazenovia. Only one timber trestle was built, to cross a deep gorge (Morgan's Gulf) near Fayetteville, while all of the other numerous ravines were filled in as a matter of course during construction. This work of filling in low areas and ravines during initial construction of the line was in direct opposition to that undertaken by the NY&OM when it was building its line. The Midland believed in trestling across all areas needing to be spanned to get the road opened, leaving to its successor the chore of filling in the wooden trestles at a later time – mostly during the early years of the Twentieth Century. The fact that the S&CV did otherwise is noteworthy because more than a handful of fills were monumental (over 75 feet in depth and up to several hundred feet in length) in size. Fortunately, monumental cuts also had to be undertaken, their material then carted by horse and wagons to the nearest fill site. And, speaking of moving earthen material, a tunnel had to be dug under Palmer Hill between Oran and Cazenovia. Before tunneling commenced, over 100,000 cubic yards of rocks and dirt were removed from both of the approaches before a 50-foot depth dictated locating the portal faces. Then, the subterranean work began, and when it was finished a 1,608-foot long tunnel was the result. More on this tunnel a little later on in the story.

The Syracuse & Chenango Valley Railroad's tunnel (right) before it was "holed through." This is the south face that looked out upon Cazenovia Lake. Courtesy of Lorenzo State Historic Site.

**The finished tunnel,
Will now make,
It possible for Syracuse,
To see the Lake.**

If wooden depots, numerous bridges, and a tunnel weren't enough to cause the complexion of the Chenango to take on a similar character to that of the Midland, then throw in a substantial grade just to make operation of the line more difficult, if not interesting. To fully appreciate the severity of the Chenango's grade, consider that the 415-foot elevation at Syracuse changed little until the Erie Canal bridge was crossed. From there it was upgrade until Cazenovia was reached at an elevation of 1,200 feet and the grade temporarily abated. But, not too far south of Cazenovia, the uphill climb returned in full fury and did not subside until just beyond Erieville where the grade topped out at 1,640 feet. From there it was downhill all the way to the Midland (NYO&W) at Earlville where the union depot stood at 1,050 feet above sea level. From this, it may appear that the southward grade from Fayetteville was the more severe climb, but that wasn't necessarily the case since it had a greater distance to overcome the change in elevation than the northward Earlville to Erieville Summit grade. What made the uphill climb more demanding for crews on southward trains was that they had to gain elevation while going through the

tunnel. Engine smoke, along with asphyxiation concerns – caused mainly by a lack of venting system in the bore, did little towards providing an environment for the enginemen's health and temperament. Negotiating nearly 90 degree curved approaches at both ends didn't make it any easier for engine crews to get their train over the road, either. Curves, like bridges, were numerous along the Chenango's hill n'dale route further impeding getting over the road in a timely and competitive fashion.



Above- A northbound Chenango Branch train is switching cars at Lebanon only a short distance from Lyon's General Store. In earlier years the store was owned by Pike & Seymour and it served as the railroad's ticket office for the community.

All of the above characteristics of the road could also be found on the Midland's line proportionally. If the Midland had, indeed, been built to Oswego via Cazenovia and Syracuse, then the Chenango's grades, bridges, depots, curves, and tunnel would have fit right in with Littlejohn's railroad and would not have seemed unique or unusual. Even its motive power was similar, with passenger and freight trains being powered by American, Mogul, and Consolidation locomotives. Only the position of the cab (eventually) differed between the two roads; end cabs for the Chenango, and mostly centercabs for the NYO&W. The later railroad eventually graduated to Tenwheelers, Bullmooses, and Mountains, although its Northern Division never saw an engine larger than a 2-8-0 which made the Chenango feel right at home when it reached Earlville. On the Chenango, Moguls and Consolidations ruled the road right up until abandonment of most of the line. Several reasons for this were short trains, light bridges, and the restricting dimensions of that lone tunnel. A sparse industry diet didn't help, either.

Despite the operation of well patronized passenger trains, and D&HCCo coal carried from Earlville to Syracuse, at the outset of operations in 1873, the S&CV was not a financial success. (Nor was it a speedy route for travel. Passenger trains routinely required 2½ to 3 hours to transit the 44 mile distance between the line's terminals. Freight trains, as you might suspect, took substantially longer to get over the road.) The cost of construction and the lack of any type of on line industrial mite – not to mention the Panic of 1873 – caused the road to fail during its first year. This circumstance, which wasn't unique to the S&CV, caused the reorganization of the railroad, as well as a change of name to Syracuse & Chenango Railroad – the Valley being stricken from the corporate title because there was hardly one that the line traversed. Unfortunately, more failures and name changes would come to the Chenango: Syracuse, Chenango & New York Railroad (1877), and Syracuse, Ontario & New York Railway (1883). The latter's change from rail***road*** to rail***way*** did little for the success of the line either. But, by that time, the poor Chenango was about to lose its individualistic identity and independent status altogether.

The beginning of the end for the independent SO&NYRy began even before it was formed from the SC&NYRR. During the very late 1870s, General William L. Burt began promoting and implementing his plan to connect his Atlantic seaboard home city of Boston with the Lake Ontario port of Oswego. Towards that end the Boston, Hoosac Tunnel & Western Railroad was formed. And, everything went wonderfully well for the General until he met up with Syracuse and, later, the also newly formed New York, West Shore & Buffalo Railway. The difficulty for the BHT&W was similar – but not identical – to the Midland's woes; the city of Syracuse was reluctant to provide the railroad with an entrance, thoroughfare, and exit into and from its territory. So, what did the General do? He attempted to outflank the city. (By the way, he had been a Judge Advocate General, not a real General.) In 1881, Burt gained financial control of the SC&NYRR who already had – along with the SNRR all of the entrances and exits from Syracuse he desired. But, because of an injunction as to the legality of his acquisition – he was not able to gain operational control of the line.

Adding to the General's woe was the NYWS&B's desire to also gain an entrance/exit into and out of Syracuse. What developed was a war of sorts between the two railroads for the SC&NY's right-of-way. The NYWS&B, of course, was the party behind the injunction to thwart the General from gaining operational control of the Chenango.

Everything might have worked out well for the General's scheme, but his death in 1882 didn't help the cause for the BHT&W. At that point there was little desire left in the surviving promoters for the Boston-Oswego route, so the NYWS&B was able to acquire the Chenango in 1883 just two months after the SC&NY had become the SO&NY. Edward F. Winslow became the Chenango's new president, a position he already held on the NYWS&B as well as the NYO&W railways, a fact that acknowledges that all three railroads were in cahoots all along.

On a cold and snowy day at Cazenovia, one of the Chenango's Moguls takes on water. That's the final depot beyond the water standpipe.

Just because the NYWS&B was now in control of the SO&NY, didn't mean that the latter road had become an immediate "fallen flag." After all, it was the Chenango's Syracuse street franchise that it had really wanted but, lo and behold, Syracuse provided a street franchise to them directly so the Chenango was allowed to go its own way willy-nilly. Clouds on the Chenango's horizon, however, were darkening. This meteorological change developed when the New York Central gained control over the NYWS&B during the final month of 1885, with the NYWS&B becoming, simply, the West Shore. Still, the Chenango remained relatively independent, but its last hoorah came in 1891. During that year, the WS purchased all the outstanding stock of the SO&NY, and on July 1st it officially became the Chenango Branch of the West Shore. When the Twentieth Century dawned, the NYC began taking a more active role in operational control of the WS and its Chenango Branch so that by the end of the second decade of the new century Chenango Branch schedules were emblazoned with NYC's oval logo and the era of the West Shore's responsibility of managing the branch had slipped into history. (The NYC didn't fully absorb the West Shore Railroad until the 1950s.)

During all the years of the Chenango's corporate change, the actual running of trains remained quite the same. Two or three daily passenger trains ran between Syracuse and the O&W at Earlville, with their schedules timed for convenient connections between the two roads. One of the passenger trains carried milk, with its scheduled time increased commensurate with its need to stop at milk stations erected (independently) at nearly all the small communities on its line. Freight operations on the Chenango Branch called for at least one daily train to make a roundtrip over the line daily. Moguls and Consolidations still headed all trains regardless of passenger or freight. Coal trains ran as extras.

Left- The Syracuse Camera Club chartered an excursion to Cazenovia in 1887, and on the return trip it appears they stopped at Lake View for a photo-op and a little fun. Courtesy of Lorenzo State Historic Site.

Because of the connection at Earlville, the O&W reasoned (in 1911) that by using the Chenango Branch its trains to and from Chicago, trains #5 and 6, could be better scheduled if they connected with the NYC at Syracuse rather than traveling all the way to Oswego. Additional time savings would also be possible with the O&W cars running over the NYC mainline rather than the old RW&O Hojack Line out of Oswego. Thus, an agreement was reached by the two railroads that allowed the two O&W trains to begin running via the Chenango Branch effective December 29, 1912, an operation that continued for nearly five years. If the building of the Chenango Branch upon the route originally desired by the Midland wasn't enough to make the branch and O&W 1st cousins, then the operation of trains #5 and 6 over the line, as well as the physical connection at Earlville, the joint use of the depot there as well as joint payment of its agent, and the transfer of passengers and freight cemented the family relationship.

Because the Chenango Branch tracks ran immediately next to the west shore of Cazenovia Lake, a large ice harvesting, storage, and shipping business resulted. The Listman brothers, Charles and Philip,

built a large icehouse at a point along the tracks between Cazenovia and the tunnel that became known as Lake View. (A picnic grounds, hotel – both on the north shore of the lake, and a lake steamer were also named Lake View.) The brothers eventually built several icehouses in Syracuse, and besides pure ice from Cazenovia Lake they also shipped in ice from Oneida Lake, Skaneatles Lake, and even the Jamesville Reservoir. The large quantity of ice being shipped from Lake View, however, caused a dramatic increase in train frequency during the harvesting season with upwards of three or more ice trains being run daily. One of these ice trains caused a horrific runaway wreck (in 1898) that is still the Chenango's most remembered tragedy and in its own way helps to perpetuate the memory of the line. (You'll have to read the book to find out this wreck's details!) This wreck aside, it has always been – and will always be – the tunnel that has managed almost singlehandedly to keep the memory of the Chenango Branch alive and well.

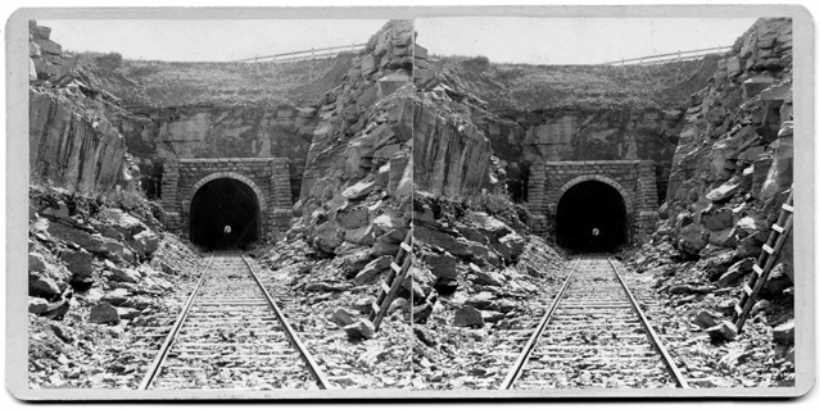
During the early evening of March 2, 1898, a 38 car ice train became a runaway shortly after passing through the tunnel. Two men were killed, and three injured, when the out-of-control train piled up (right) just beyond Fayetteville after reaching a speed in excess of 60 miles-per-hour! As a result of this wreck, all ice trains originating at Lake View were restricted to 30 cars.

The Chenango's tunnel has always captured the imagination of the residents and townships along the line if for no other reason than it was the only railroad tunnel within the two counties (Madison and Onondaga) it served as well as all of central New York. At the time of its completion, the 1,608 foot bore was considered the S&CV's engineering landmark – an achievement and a marvel all wrapped up into one. It was the awe-inspiring equivalent of the Midland's Lyon Brook Bridge – an architectural and man-made undertaking previously thought to be unbuildable and would eventually lead to some form of disaster. Yet, from its very beginning the Chenango's tunnel served the road faithfully and caused little inconvenience or safety concern to the traveling public. Yes, portions of its walls and ceiling occasionally collapsed, watchmen had to be employed to monitor its condition, and a snowplow ran through its doors, but the tunnel never embargoed the line unlike Mother Nature or Old Man Winter did to other portions of the route. Much like the bridge over Lyon Brook, lovers kissed within the presence of the tunnel, folks walked through it just to be able to brag they had done so, it was guarded during World War One, and visitors came from far and near just to stand in its presence and get a good look at the subterranean passage under Palmer Hill. Of course, people rode through it in passenger cars, too! About the only thing wrong with the tunnel was its interior clearance that dictated usage of only economy size steam locomotives. (Engine size/weight was also limited by ratings for bridges.)

While the tunnel was somewhat of an everyday nuisance for the railroad, the Chenango did seem to manage being mild mannered about its existence, at least early on, and was not averse to providing some good natured humor regarding travel through it. The following story appeared in a January 1873 edition of the Cazenovia Republican:

"The directors of the Syracuse & Chenango Valley Railroad recently passed a resolution to the effect that kissing would no longer be allowed by passengers while going through the tunnel. This action is considered necessary in view of the fact that this pernicious practice is on the increase, and when

performed within the confided air of the tunnel, the concussion, or more properly speaking, the percussion, is so great as to seriously jar the masonry and increase the liability to accidents. The immediate cause of the adoption of this prohibitory measure was the performances of a bridal party from the vicinity of Erieville that made the dark passage one day last week. There was so much percussion on this occasion that a brakeman was blown clear from the platform and a section of the abutments was also slightly injured. If the passage of this resolution is not found to be sufficient for the suppression of the evil complained of, it will be necessary to cause the lamps to be lighted before entering upon the underground passage. The safety of passengers demands prompt and vigorous measures."



Above- The Chenango's subterranean passageway, with a light at its end.

As the years wore on, especially while under NYC control, the tunnel became an increasingly difficult and costly property to manage and maintain. The masonry lining deteriorated so that pieces of it were a constant threat to the safe passage of trains, and falling rock was a similar – if not more potent – threat. The Central laid out a lot of money over the years to install a wood lining with timber supports through most of the tunnel's length, while three masonry and brick/stone sections were put in to overcome problems in the remaining footage. In 1912, the tunnel was lengthened by erecting new concrete portal faces, and within these new faces accommodation was made for pairs of wooden doors to be installed at both portals. The purpose of the doors was to keep cold weather out, which had primarily been the culprit for the interior deterioration. The watchmen opened and closed them after trains came and went – except for the time the snow plow went through the south set of doors!

Throughout the life of the railroad and its tunnel, much work was done to keep the passage of trains through the tunnel safe from obstructions, but little – if anything – had been done to provide for the engine crew's health as their hard working steam engine labored through. Which brings us to the sub-title for this article: The Vexing Question of the Tunnel's Vent.

Jim and I first learned that a vent may have been installed in the tunnel when we interviewed Ed Tracy, current owner of B. H. Tracy Lumber Company of Fayetteville. Ed's grandfather, Burnell Huntington Tracy, had run a creamery in Oran that was a prolific shipper of milk over the railroad before entering the lumbering trade. Well, one day, Ed was traveling with his Dad in their trusty pickup truck along New York State Route 92 that ran in close proximity to the Chenango Branch between Manlius and Cazenovia. As they rode along, they couldn't help but take notice of a train running in the same direction as they were, and as they approached the tunnel, Ed's Dad said, "Look over there and you'll see smoke come out of the ground where there's a vent." Sure enough, Ed looked, and he saw what he believes was the steam engine's smoke coming out of a tunnel vent.

We told Ed that we had not known that a vent had been installed in the tunnel, which he even seemed unsure of to some degree, but we assured him that we would let him know if we found any documentation as to the existence of one. We never did, not even after reviewing an exhaustive amount of NYC paperwork regarding improvements made to the tunnel over the years. Still, Ed stuck to his story and believes what he saw was smoke coming out of a hole in the ground if nothing else. So, Jim and I thought

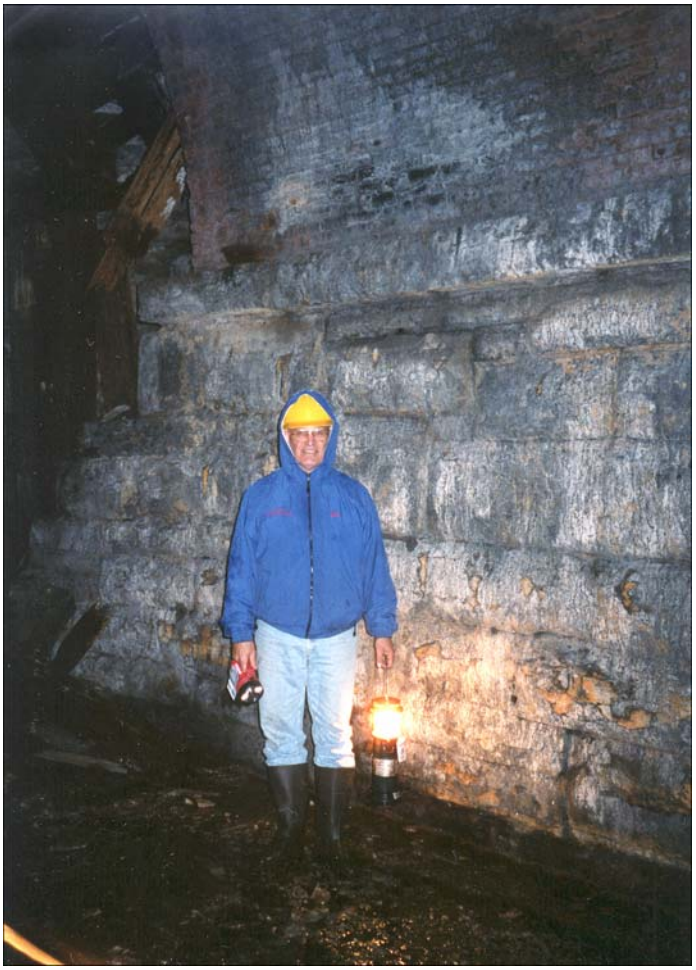
we'd better make a thorough inspection of the interior of the tunnel, so we arranged to do just that. We contacted Jim Williams, the tunnel's current owner – yes, people do indeed own tunnels, and we set up an exploration date to see what the tunnel interior might be able to tell us. We had two goals we wished to accomplish: 1- Thoroughly check the tunnel's ceiling for evidence of a vent, and 2- Measure its length from portal face to portal face. To complete #2, we shot a laser beam through the tunnel, whose light was reflected back from a mirror at the other portal. A length of 1,631.3 feet was established. This would be the post-1912 length. Goal number 1 was not so easily accomplished.

We entered the long abandoned tunnel from its south portal and proceeded northward towards the light still visible at the other end. After inspecting the tunnel's interior, we shot a laser beam through the bore to measure its length. Exploring the tunnel was risky business. We hope the last thing to transit the 1,631.3 foot distance between the portals will be the laser

On that cold and snowy November day in 2006, our exploration party – numbering over a dozen persons and with a newspaper reporter in tow – we entered the south portal of the abandoned Chenango's tunnel armed with powerful lights of all descriptions, foul weather gear to ward off dripping moisture, hard hats to protect the noggin, and boots to keep the tootsies dry. Still, we were not prepared for what turned out to be a potentially dangerous undertaking.

Most of the timbers that had at one time supported the timber lining had deteriorated to such a degree that the wooden twelve-by-twelves were lying helter skelter match-stick like across the tunnel floor. With the lining down, many large pieces of the tunnel roof and side walls had been able to also break free to also end up on the floor. Some of these rock pieces were so big they obviously helped to bring down the rotted wood. In other places where the timber posts still supported the wood roof lining, other large chunks of rock were sitting atop the wood just waiting to crash to the floor. Wary of threats from above, we also had to constantly climb over timbers and rocks, and negotiate through puddles of varying depth. And, everywhere there was moisture that made everything s-l-i-p-p-e-r-y.

We were quite surprised, however, that the three masonry brick/stone sections within the tunnel were in such wonderful condition, with hardly a blemish upon the roof and sidewalls. Only a little water seeped



Left- Author Taibi within one of the three masonry sections. The stone work was in remarkably good condition considering its age of 94 years.
Below- The wood lined sections were not preserved as well. Some of the wall and ceiling timbers have collapsed and the roof lining has all but disappeared.
All tunnel interior pictures by Dave Hale.

All three brick arches in the masonry sections were intact and without any evidence of a vent.

through at some points in the sidewalls. Besides their condition, we marveled at how wonderfully attractive the stone work was, work that would have received wide acclaim at parks, botanical gardens, and a millionaire's country estate.

Whether negotiating the rugged timber sections or the relatively untouched masonry sections, we scoured the roof with our light(s) looking for any evidence of a vent. We saw nothing of a vent whatsoever. We resolved to not say anything to Ed Tracy.

Upon reaching the north portal, there was a large pool of water across the entire width of the tunnel floor; its depth unknown. I cared little. There was no way I was going to retrace my steps back through the tunnel. I entered the pool of water and found my boots were only an inch or two too short. Jim had waders on and he fared better. His feet remained dry, mine were soaked. Others in the party turned around and went back through. Nuts to that!

Right- When we got near the north portal some of the exploration party didn't want to forge the mini-lake so they went back through the tunnel. I waded into the water and got wet tootsies but once through the tunnel was enough for me. This view looks out the north portal.

With the exploration and research completed, we concluded there was never a vent in this 1,631.3 foot long bore. And, really, why should there have been. The similarly long Northfield Tunnel (1,646 feet) on the O&W had no vent; the longer tunnel on the Lehigh Valley at Vosburg, PA (3,902 feet) had no vent, and even the nearly one-mile long Otisville Tunnel (5,312 feet) on the Erie Railroad had no vent. And, had any of these tunnels had vents, including the Chenango's, there would have had to have been something more than just a pipe sticking up out of the tunnel roof to the surface above. Otherwise, smoke and its gases would only lazily be emitted. There would have to have been some type of mechanical device to help evacuate the smoke and gases from the bore. On the Chenango's tunnel there was no evidence of a mechanical contrivance, either. Case closed. No vent. Sorry, Ed.

Just when we had laid the question of the vent to rest, we noticed on the Chenango Branch website (www.chenangobranch.com) a posting by a fellow named Larry. He said that he had gone through the tunnel 10 years or so ago and saw a vent pipe protruding from the middle masonry section! Egads! So, I gave Larry a call and we talked at length about what we saw and what he saw. While he did admit that he had nothing much more than a flashlight to illuminate the tunnel interior he believed he saw a vent hole. I couldn't agree with him because what our exploration entourage saw was nearly pristine masonry sections.

What Larry thinks he saw may have been influenced by another Ed Tracy story. Ed told Larry that one time his Dad was horseback riding across the top of the tunnel, and that his horse stopped and then put his nose down into a vent hole/pipe. Ed's Dad surmised that the horse either liked the smell of coal smoke or he was trying to warm his nose. Well, all Jim and I have to say is that Ed Tracy is a great guy who loved his father, and has some very nice tales to tell about the Chenango Branch as his lumber yard was one of the line's steadfast consignees right up to the end of the railroads service. Ed could never be dissuaded about his father's and his memories, nor should anyone try to do so. To Ed there was a vent. Larry thinks there was a vent. Jim and I saw no evidence of one nor did we find any documentation as to

its existence. We don't think there was ever a vent. We'll let you decide for yourself. But, whatever you do, don't promote the pro-vent theory unless you have some hard evidence to back up your claim. Before we return to the Chenango Branch story, I'll provide you with an idea proposed by the Chenango Branch webmaster, Pete Shank. "Could the railroad have drilled test bores to see what type of material they would have to excavate to dig the tunnel? Or, are there natural fissures within Palmer Hill? Both may have allowed the Chenango's steam engine smoke to drift up naturally" so that Ed could see smoke coming out of the hill and a horse could get his smoke fix. That's why the question of the Chenango's vent is so vexing. I think it's a closed cold case. But, personally, I do like the story of "No Kissing Allowed in the Tunnel!"

After the NYC took an active role in managing the Chenango Branch it became increasingly disenfranchised with the line's inability to pay its own way. Besides the shipping of milk from a creamery at almost every station and the running of seasonal ice trains there was little other industry along the line. There was a powder works at Belmont that kept the railroad hoppin' for a few years until it blew itself to smithereens, a short lived tourist trade to Cazenovia Lake until the O&W began promoting its service to Sylvan Beach, and a stone quarry at Constantine that loaded up a train load of cars periodically, and that was about all of the important shippers situated on the line. Oh yes, there was the B. H. Tracy Lumber Company, too.

From 1948 until 1964 Manlius was the southern terminus of the Chenango Branch. Although the railroad is now gone, the depot there still survives (left) to help perpetuate the memory of the line.

Consequently, the NYC had finally had enough of its branch line that acted like a bridge line between the O&W at Earlville and its mainline at Syracuse, and it decided to sever the line. After all, the NYC didn't need the O&W as much as the O&W – and the Midland earlier – needed the NYC. In 1937 – the same year the O&W fell into receivership – the first of a series of sectional abandonments laid waste to the Chenango Branch. In that year, service between Earlville and Cazenovia was discontinued, the rails taken up, and the Earlville depot became a non-union station. Seven years later the same thing happened to the Oran-Cazenovia section, which particularly pleased the NYC since they wouldn't have to worry about maintaining the tunnel any longer. They hadn't had to worry about kissing passengers there since 1933. At this point the NYC was getting the hang of the abandonment business so the section from Manlius to Oran was similarly quieted in 1948. By that time Diesels had come to the Chenango, in the form of ALCo switchers, and maybe if they had been born ten years earlier trains would still have been running through the tunnel to at least Cazenovia. Whether there was a vent in the tunnel or not would matter little to the chunky locomotives with their internal combustion 539 engines inside.

For sixteen years the Chenango Branch ended at Manlius, but nothing lasts forever. Service there ended in 1964 with the line cut back just far enough to continue serving Ed Tracy's lumber company. OK, there were a few other consignees at Fayetteville, too. Regardless, by the end of 1977 the last train had high-tailed it out of town so that only a mere fraction of the Chenango's total 44 miles was still in service, mostly in Dewitt and not even in Syracuse.

Besides the Chenango's tunnel and five of its stations, many of the line's bridge abutments also survive. In this scene, above, Jim Georges points to the remaining stonework for bridge E-46 with Georgetown Creek still coursing between the abutments. Photograph by Janice Georges.

The Chenango Branch, much like its 1st cousin the NYO&WRy, was a railroad built upon promise, with a desire to bring prosperity to its online communities if they would only do the same for the railroad. It turned out to be a one way street; the railroads did there share, the communities didn't reciprocate. Oh, they did the best they could but since industry didn't develop and cars and trucks came along to scurry about on the improved roads, the railroads were left to a fate that ended in abandonment. Maybe that's one reason why the Chenango – and the O&W – are remembered so fondly; the communities and their citizens knew they let the railroads down.

So, that's the purpose of the Ontario & Western Railway Historical Society **Observer** that you will receive later this year; to let you know that the O&W's 1st cousin hasn't really been forgotten at all. ***A Ride through the Countryside on the Syracuse & Chenango Valley Railroad*** will help to perpetuate the memory of the line, and in so doing will enhance the memory of the O&W as well as help fulfill the OWRHS mission, too. Jim and I think you'll enjoy our book; start looking for it in your mailbox in June.