

# THE MARKER LIGHT

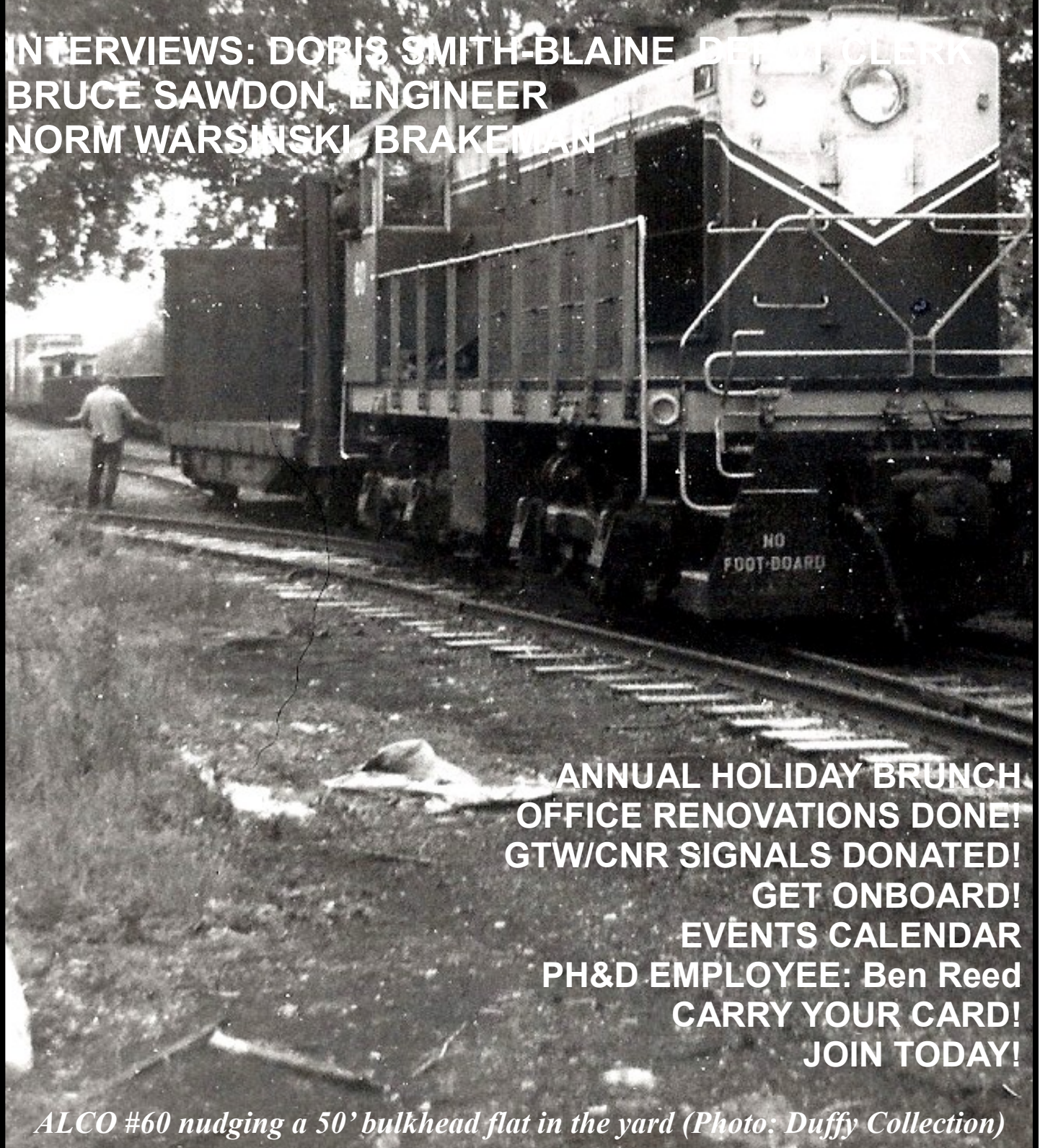
NUMBER 25

THE PORT HURON & DETROIT RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING

## SWITCHING at MARINE CITY

INTERVIEWS: DORIS SMITH-BLAINE, DETROIT CLERK  
BRUCE SAWDON, ENGINEER  
NORM WARSINSKI, BRAKEMAN



ANNUAL HOLIDAY BRUNCH!  
OFFICE RENOVATIONS DONE!  
GTW/CNR SIGNALS DONATED!  
GET ONBOARD!  
EVENTS CALENDAR  
PH&D EMPLOYEE: Ben Reed  
CARRY YOUR CARD!  
JOIN TODAY!

*ALCO #60 nudging a 50' bulkhead flat in the yard (Photo: Duffy Collection)*

Cover: Built in 1920, the Marine City depot was at the southern end of the line.

PG. 2: From Where I Sit; Annual Holiday Luncheon 2015

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PG. 4: Switching At Marine City

PG. 5: Marine City Switching Layout

PG. 6: Interview: Doris Smith-Blaine

PG. 7: Interview: Bruce Sawdon

PG. 8: 2016 Calendar; PH&DRR Employee: Ben Reed; Join; Purpose of the Society; Board of Directors



Dear Friends of the PH&D:

In this issue, we tackle "Switching at Marine City". It includes first-hand interviews with former Marine City depot clerk, Doris Smith-Blaine and Engineer Bruce Sawdon, giving us accounts of what life was about when it was train time. Then, for the first time ever, we offer a modelling design based upon the Marine City blueprints on a shelf layout. Now no excuse to start your PH&D layout! Plenty of switching operation.

It's Spring. About time, eh? We have National Train Day and a new Port Huron railroad show coming soon. Speaking of the show, we would like to publicly thank Fred Cesefski who, for 30 years, had almost single-handedly produced this annual Port Huron Train Show. A deep bow to you, Fred. The show now has been relocated for 2016. See the back for details. Saturdays At the Wye resumes May 7. We need help as we have many new tasks with renovating the offices. We promise a more timely attention to schedules. See website for updates.

**FROM WHERE I SIT**

Finally, we note the passing in December of **Ray Warsinski** who we honored in last Fall's *Marker Light*. Ray was Head Brakeman in train service with the railroad for more than 30 years. We'd like to mention **Dallas Brownson**, a long-time member of the Society, who also has passed on.

See you out at the Wye!

**Sandy Duffy**

**ANNUAL HOLIDAY LUNCHEON**

About 35 PH&DRR Historical Society members gathered on December 12 for the annual holiday lunch. Photographer Kurt Stetzer flew in from California to help with the auction which raised over \$900 for the treasury. We even had a few retirees show up, notably former Superintendent Bill Munce and Trainmaster Bill Schultz. The crew at the Dorsey House showed us all their warm hospitality and the event ended at about 3:00 o'clock. Thanks to all the board members who came out!



*Old friends reunite. (L) Superintendent William Munce, Interchange Clerk Sandy Duffy, Trainmaster William Schultz, and Roundhouse Forman Bruce Sawdon*



*Sandy Duffy presents board member Aaron Farmer with a custom-framed portrait from Kurt Stetzer for his effort in locating and arranging the sale of PH&D Alco Engine #52*

**Building Committee News**

The Committee has been really successful and has recently completed renovations of both the Agent's and Superintendent's offices. It all began with new drywall installed by Andy Coombes, then a ceiling and wall painting by fellow Society member Mike Titterington. John Schmidt and Roger Meas installed stained and varnished oak window sills, doorway and window frames, and floor boards. By the time you next visit the offices out at the wye, you'll see the final addition of brand new carpeting.

We have to thank our donors and our volunteers who worked tirelessly to finish this project. We now have two office rooms which form the basis of our Society headquarters.

Our next project is to eliminate a floor joist with a steel plate. Following that, we are looking upstairs to the second floor ceiling. We'd like to insulate and seal the whole operation.

"Saturdays at the Wye begin May 7. We'll have a schedule shortly on our website.



**ACQUISITIONS**

We depend upon many friends from all over and that includes the CNR Signal Department. Mike Burgett and Bill Gee of the Michigan Division have been upgrading signals along the CNR mainline. When they recently removed two signal towers, one dated to 1957 and the other to 1990, they generously donated them to the Society! Both units feature the older classic "search light" style lamps. The earliest brings to mind engineers from the classic 4-8-4 Northerns, waiting for a bold green to send them westward. These two towers were removed from the mainline just past Wadhams Road. Saving rail history: it's what we do. Thanks guys!

Thanks also to board members T.J. Gaffney and Aaron Farmer for facilitating this transfer!



**SWITCHING AT MARINE CITY**

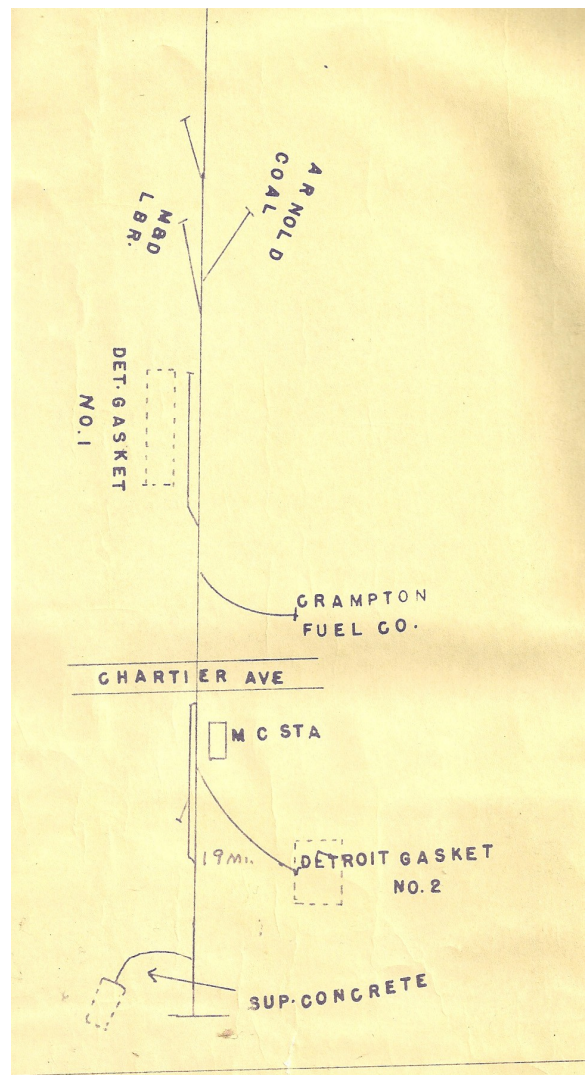
It's July, 1950. A pretty 20-year old girl rides her bicycle west along Chartier Street. As she pedals, the morning sunlight flickers through the trees and birdsong is everywhere. Neighbors wave from porches. She slows at the corner of M-25, and then, less than a block later, arrives at the grey-stone railroad station with a red REX sign in white letters in the window. Leaning her bike against the wall, she takes her lunch from the front basket, and glances south at the distant line of boxcars in the yard. It's going to be warm. The screen door creaks as she opens it. "Morning, Doris." It's station agent, Grant Bigger. She replies with a smile, "Good Morning, Mr. Bigger."

And so it begins, another lazy, breezy, summer day. She'll sort through and begin typing the morning waybills which will go out later. Then, an hour for lunch. Sometimes a rare customer or two will come in with a package or crate. Mostly though, the day slowly takes its time. Small town, quiet town. Dogs bark, children play, and someone pushes a lawnmower nearby. It will be nearly two o'clock when they will hear the train "blowing the crossings". She'll go to the bay window and there it is, far to the north, the headlight.

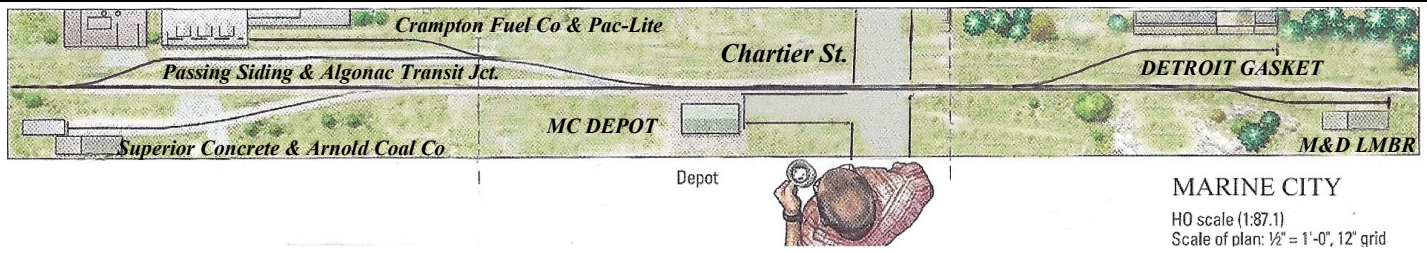
Everyone in town knows it's train time. Kids appear and cars slow and wait, as the red and gray diesel and its train comes to a stop just shy of the Chartier Street crossing. The crew climbs down, walks across the street, and goes inside the station. Traffic resumes and so does life in this small, downriver town.



*Here's our mid 1940s map. It shows every customer at the time: Detroit Gasket, Crampton Coal, a short spur leading east of the depot, Reed Products, and Superior Concrete. It includes the Marine City "we" which dates this map to the late 1940s.*



*This is the William Frasier map, dated to 1959. It's more of a schematic and not to scale. But it gets us closer to a layout design we can use. Arnold Coal, M&D Lumber, Detroit Gasket Company, Crampton Fuel, and Superior Concrete. Detroit Gasket #2 was replaced with Pac-Lite. Not shown is Star Oil Company, which you can add to your layout. Marine City had at least four coal dealers.*



**A MARINE CITY SWITCHING LAYOUT**

With appreciation to the March 2016 issue of *Model Railroader*, here's a proposed shelf layout based upon the PH&DRR Marine City terminus. The date range is from mid 1950s to the 1980s. This is a 15"x144" shelf design. We've included most of the major customers found on the previous maps. We've added Superior Concrete and Arnold Coal to the "southern" customer list which includes Crompton Fuel Company and Pac-Lite. Detroit Gasket is here along with the venerable M&D Lumber, which were located north, where they should be. Both of these customers feature a trailing switch to access the assignments.

The invisible connection is the junction with Algonac Transit Company, owned by Chris Craft, That passing siding will be used as our transfer for the plant's Plymouth engine-led train. Having boxcars loaded with "Kit Boats" and a few flatcars with 40' cruisers and 26' runabouts would be excellent. As a matter of fact, bringing down a boxcar of marine engines from Chrysler would add another switching task..

Crompton Fuel Company can be enhanced if we add fuel oil to their commodity list in addition to coal. That way, we can also spot a tank car in addition to the coal hopper they need. I count a total of 7 customers, two more if you include those two furniture stores Doris alluded to. So this shelf design should offer plenty of interesting switching tasks. Lastly, don't forget to spot that merchandise car at the station loading dock!



*The depot window advertises that we're an authorized REX shipper. The switch leads to Reed Products. And there is that loading dock Doris referred to. Just leave a boxcar there for loading and pickup the following day!*



*PH&D #1035 is at Pac-Lite, 1980. It was part of an order for 100 cars which arrived in the Spring of 1977. These cars were AAR designated "XM" loading for general purpose use. Photo: Don Cuthbertson Collection.*



*50' bulk-head flat car at M&D Lumber.*



*Note the spur track leading off to the loading docks.*



## INTERVIEW Doris Smith-Blaine

**ML: When did you start at the PH&D?**

**DSB:** 1950. Grant Bigger, who was the station agent then, asked if I would come to work since his other clerk was leaving. I was 20 years old at the time and agreed to do it.

**ML: What was your schedule?**

**DSB:** I worked Tuesday through Saturday. Sunday and Monday were off. Grant had Saturday and Sunday off. He worked Monday through Friday.

**ML: How did you get to work?**

**DSB:** I lived only 5 blocks away so I either rode my bike or walked.

**ML: How did you begin your day?**

**DSB:** I typed up waybills in the morning. Mostly from Chris Craft; they were shipping "Kit-boats" then. These were loaded into boxcars and brought up from Algonac and

placed in the yard south of us. Then these loads would be taken north by the afternoon train. In the afternoon, I did the bookwork. I had to post and balance the revenue bills for every load by day, and then by the week. Every day, at around 4 o'clock, Grant would take them up to the 32nd Street offices.

**ML: When did the train arrive?**

**DSB:** We could hear it blowing for the crossings from a long way off. That track leading north from the station was pretty straight so we could see the headlight from pretty far. It came in at around 2 o'clock every afternoon.

**ML: When they reached the depot, what happened next?**

**DS:** The crew usually stopped and came in for a chat! I remember Ben Reed was the engineer.

**ML: Did you have anything prepared for them?**

**DSB:** No. They had a switch list that they worked off of. After they left, they'd start switching the yard.

**ML: On some of our maps, we see Crampton Fuel Company, Detroit Gasket, and M&D Lumber.**

**DSB:** Crampton sold coal and usually received a coal car. Detroit Gasket had loads brought in which were unloaded at their docks. And M&D got loads of lumber. It was owned by Don MacDonald. Now, there's nothing left but condos.

**ML: Anyone else receive shipments that you remember?**

**DSB:** Yes, there were two furniture stores in town, Becker and Rolls Furniture. Sometimes, boxcars loaded with furniture came in and they'd send a truck to load the crates from the boxcars.

**ML: Did they unload the boxcars?**

**DSB:** No, the train crew did that?

**ML: When did you break for lunch?**

**DSB:** Oh, twelve to one. Grant went earlier.

**ML: The Marine City and St. Clair depots were registered Railway Express agencies. Did you process invoices for them?**

**DSB:** We did some business but not a lot. We had to weigh each item. That was done in the warehouse up back.

**ML: Both depots had a separate room several steps up through a door.**

**DSB:** Yes, that was where we had the shipping forms, scales, and some handcarts.

**ML: Toward the rear of the warehouse room, there was a sliding door leading to a loading dock. Were cars spotted there?**

**DSB:** Yes, sometimes a boxcar was left outside that door. Grant would break the seals if it was a load. Otherwise, we would process shipments which we'd load into an empty car.

**ML: Did you have much contact with the St. Clair depot?**

**DSB:** Oh yes. Mac McCallum was the agent and Jack McCormack worked with him. One morning, I got a phone call from someone who wanted to know if we could process a load of cattle. Then he asked if we had a holding pen or any corrals since he wanted to bring them in the next day. I asked Grant about this and then told the man we couldn't help him. Turned out it was Mac on the other end. That was his idea of a joke!

**ML: Mac was like that; he took all my first pay in a poker game once. When did you leave the PH&D?**

**DSB:** It was in 1956. They decided to close the Marine City station. There just wasn't the traffic to justify keeping it open. When it was closed, Grant went up to the 32nd Street offices.

**ML: Well Doris, this has been a rare return to the days when life was slower and more leisurely. Even though Marine City was at the end of the line, it will always represent the epitome of a small town depot.**

**DSB:** It was all that back then and only the memories remain. It was nice of you to remind me of those good old days!



*XMAS Party Poker Players*

### INTERVIEW: Bruce Sawdon & Norm Warsinski

**ML:** You both hired in at about the same time.

**BS:** Yes, I joined the section gang in about 1952. A year or so later, they asked me to go out on the road. I started out as fireman with Charley Green. We had Carl Kohn, Gurdon Watson, and Ben Reed. Ed Short, he was the conductor, and Ray and Norm (Warsinski Brothers). Ernie Rebeske who worked with Al Wurzel.

**NW:** That's about right. Right around the late 1940s.

**ML:** Before we talk about Marine City, lets clear up a few details. Before your train headed south, your conductor had lists of cars, right?

**BS:** Yes, he had two forms; one was a book and he kept a record of his moves in that. The other was a switch list and that showed how he's going to put the cars in the train. He got all this from the Yard Master. Back then it was Bert Sari, then, later, Bill Schultz. He wrote all this down at the 32nd Street office, in the trainmen's room.

**ML:** Now, once he'd gotten his lists made out, your crew would head out.

**BS:** Generally, the day job would head up into the yard and start making up their train. These were loads and empties that were heading south. We also had to do work on the cars left down along the line from the night job, the day before.

**ML:** When you left 32nd Street, after rounding the west leg of the wye, where did you go next?

**BS:** We'd do either South Park, the Dow area, or Marysville if there wasn't much to do. Then we'd head straight to Marine City. The night job had already been down there with empties and so the day job went down to pick up the loads. That was how it worked. We'd get there and begin using that passing track to run around.

**ML:** Did you ever spot anything at the station?

**BS:** You know, every now and then we'd have to place a loaded boxcar next to that loading door.

**ML:** Who unloaded it?

**BS:** We did! Same with St. Clair. They had the big dollies and freight carts in the depot. A lot of it was for Chris Craft. Crates, or a motor, that there. You'd park it right there and throw the plate in between (the boxcar and the loading dock). Tell you another thing about the depot, George & Jim (Duffy) had special electric service put in, transformers, to power up the air conditioning and power for the Castleblayne. It was on a special pole next to the station.

**NW:** The PH&D always had what we called a "merchandise car". It was kept to bring in loads, LCL (less-than-carload) parcels which were shipped in to either depots. It was a 40' boxcar they used for both the St. Clair and Marine City stations.

**ML:** Ok, that I did not know. How did you guys handle Chris Craft?

**BS:** We'd go down the main line or side track, if Chris Craft was down there, and stay in the clear if they had any cars for us. If they had a yacht or something like that they brought up, Carl Kohn would bring his track gang in and they'd have to go down and level the track all right up, before we could move it.

**NW:** You know we did bring lumber down to them as well. We'd spot a load at the far end of the line. They'd bring that little jitney up which as a matter of fact could handle a pretty good sized train.

**ML:** One of our customers was Pac-Lite, which was a plastic cooler plant, right?

**BS:** They made Styrofoam coolers. That switch leading off from the station to the east went into Pac-Lite. We'd come into Marine City and run around the train and go in with an empty box in front and just shove it in there.

**ML:** When did you switch Detroit Gasket?

**BS:** After we finished the yard, we'd go up and spot the Gasket. Then, if we had any for M&D, we'd do them.

Used to be the Gasket 2 Plant. One time we went as far south as we could go to drop off a coal car for the City. If I remember right it was a sewage treatment plant.

**NW:** I was always in favor of switching Gasket when we got to it first! That M&D, I remember dropping a hopper car of coal into M&D along with their lumber flats. Don't know if they sold coal or used it.

**ML:** Would you take lunch at the station?

**BS:** No, we'd get done and come back around the caboose, pick it up then head north to St. Clair. We'd be looking to switch Biewer (Lumber) by then and then lunch.

**ML:** You remember Arnold Coal?

**BS:** That was the one I was trying to think of, Norm.

**NW:** Yep, there were a number of coal yards down there, come to think of it. At least four that I can think of.

**ML:** Well boys, we all learned more than we did, and I'll bet we all appreciate your sharing!

**2016 EVENTS CALENDAR**

Apr 16	Board Meeting	32nd St Wye	9:00A
May 14	Board Meeting	32nd St Wye	9:00A
14	National Train Day	32nd St. Wye	10:00A
22	Port Huron Train Show	BW Conv Cntr	10:00A

NOTE: **Board Meetings changed to 2nd Saturdays**  
 All members and guests are welcome to attend monthly board meetings.

**Saturdays at the Wye** will resume **May 7**. Check the website for events and announcements.

Website: [www.phdrailroad.com](http://www.phdrailroad.com)  
 Email: [info@phdrailroad.com](mailto:info@phdrailroad.com)

If you'd like to come up on a Saturday to watch and photograph trains, make sure you have a paid-up membership card allowing unlimited access to the Society-owned west half of the "wye" property. Please stay off CSX property including the Roundhouse.

	PORT HURON and DETROIT RAILROAD CO. - St. Clair Blue Water Route -
	PORT HURON & DETROIT RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY <b>MEMBERSHIP CARD</b>
NAME: _____	
JOINED: _____ / _____ MO/YEAR	

Regulations covering access to U.S. rail yards are in effect, administered by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and enforced by local enforcement agencies. Accordingly, those with PH&DRRHS membership cards must, if requested, present their cards to authorized personnel from either CN, CSX, or St. Clair County Sheriff's officers. When visiting, please stay on the west side of the yellow line (PH&DRRHS property).

**The purpose of**  
*The Port Huron & Detroit Railroad Historical Society is:*

*To collect, archive, preserve, and present, all for the education of the community, historical documents, photographs, drawings, artifacts and equipment relating to The Port Huron & Detroit Railroad Company and its predecessors, The Port Huron Southern Railway and The Detroit Bay City & Western Railroad, as well as the Grand Trunk Western/Canadian National, and the Pere Marquette/Chesapeake and Ohio.*

*To obtain, restore and maintain the roundhouse at 32<sup>nd</sup> Street for use as a museum, as well as other structures, artifacts, and rolling stock, as they may become available;*

*To accumulate, conserve, and index all data relating to the above-named railroads for the use of scholars, rail fans and scale modelers.*

**Special Thanks:**  
**To Mike Davenport for his generous donation!**

**Special Thanks:**  
**To Hugh Hales who presented us a check to cover this year's ML!**

**PH&DRR EMPLOYEES:**

**BEN REED**

Ben Reed probably came to the PH&DRR in the 1940s. He was known to be a man of good character and unflappable nature. He is most associated with the



last of the huskier steam engines which operated during WW2. He was one of the first "steam men" to switch to the new ALCO diesels, when they came to the line in 1945. Ben's grand-daughter provided this excellent picture of Ben about to "oil around" as they say.

**JOIN NOW AND GET ONBOARD!**

The *Port Huron & Detroit Railroad Historical Society* needs your talent! We invite you to join committees, contribute your time with hands on restoration projects, and be on board at this early, critical stage.

Membership, publicity, web design, resource development, lawn mowing, and acquisitions, are just a few of the areas that you can help out with.

For only \$30 a year, you'll receive 4 nifty newsletters, a chance to help create the area's first railroad transportation museum complex, and have exclusive Member-only access to the 32nd Street "Wye" and a Class I rail yard.

Mail to:  
 PH&DRRHS, P.O. Box 217, Marysville, MI 48040.

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**Special Thanks:**  
**Mino Kramer & Kay Houghton for our carpet!**