

# THE MARKER LIGHT

NUMBER 37

FOR FANS & MODELERS OF THE PORT HURON & DETROIT RAILROAD

SUMMER 2019

## TAPPAN TOWER & THE PH&D

An exclusive interview with  
Operator Bob Carlisle

New Book by Charles H. Geletzke Jr.

ACQUISITIONS: The Roundhouse; Still No Word  
1948 Lashup Pix

Interview Part III: Bruce Sawdon  
"Matching the Prototype" Update: Matt Sturgell  
The Authentic Purpose of the PH&DRRHS

Looking East (Duffy Collection)

Cover: Mt. Clemens subdivision joins the GTW main in this view from Tappan Tower. PH&D yard on far right.

PG. 2: From Where I Sit; A Fourth Volume by Charles H. Geletzke, Jr.

PG. 3: Acquisitions: The Roundhouse; And We're Still Waiting; Summer of 1948: New Cabooses!

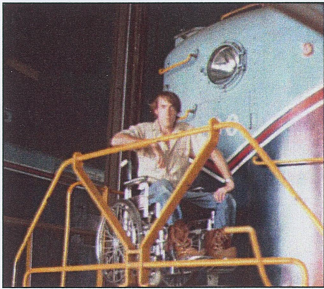
PG. 4: Tappan Tower & The PH&D; Interview with Operator Robert Carlisle

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**FROM WHERE I SIT**

Dear Friends of the PH&D,

We seem to have a Grand Trunk Western theme going on here. First, we are very pleased to cover the operations up in Tappan Tower with an interview with **Bob Carlisle**. He was one of Grand Trunk Western's last Tower Operators. Tappan was the nexus for all three railroads and Bob was busy directing traffic, in and out of Port Huron. Want to add my thanks also to **Bill Schultz** who hauled me up all those steps so many years ago to visit with Bob in his last weeks as the "Leverman"!

Next, I was contacted recently by **Matthew Sturgell**. He'd read both articles on "Matching the Prototype" and offered more information on those Grand Trunk cars, covering the series that had been interchanged to us for our downriver customers. Being able to obtain these cars with near matching numbers advances our PH&DRR layouts up a notch in terms of realism and prototypical operation. I have to believe there's a subconscious pleasure knowing you're moving your consist south, carrying the right cars!

Then, I picked up the fourth book by our Grand Trunk Western pal, **Charles H. Geletzke, Jr.** If you're a local railfan, be sure to get all four. In all the volumes, he writes about his career on the "Trunk", which describes scenes most of us are familiar with. The stories are funny and evoke a time when railroading was something you looked forward to every day.

And finally, we finish our three-part interview with **Bruce Sawdon**, the PH&DRR's last roundhouse foreman and ALCO engineman. He saw it all, from the section gang, brakeman, engineer, roundhouse boss positions, and then as a CSX employee, after the sale. His observations on it all are a poignant reminder of railroading with class and common sense.

**Sandy Duffy**

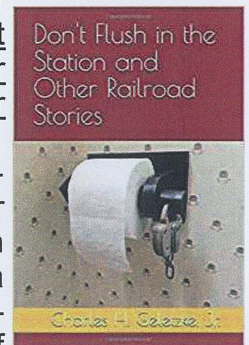
### **A Fourth Volume by Charles H. Geletzke, Jr.**

Fans of local Grand Trunk Western operations will be pleased to add a fourth volume to their collection, from veteran GTW engineman, Charles H. Geletzke, Jr. His latest is called Don't Flush in the Station and Other Railroad Stories, available through Amazon. Author Geletzke has three other excellent volumes, When Deadhead Counted as Rest and Other Railroad Stories (Volume I), With the Slack, That Will Do, and Other Railroad Stories (Volume II), and So, You Think You'd Like to Railroad and Other Stories (Volume III).

His books are especially appealing for a number of reasons. First, his writing style is accessible and affable. He recounts experiences over a 40 year career which are all entertaining. Second, his explanation of the technical, which often includes train movements, equipment, and procedure, are presented in terms a non-railroader would understand. And lastly, his tenure on the Grand Trunk Western covered areas we locals immediately identify. Most of us, especially those of us who worked for local railroads, know where he describes.

All four volumes contain vignettes of day and night experiences. They cover his early days all the way up to his turn as a mainline engineer. Charley did it all from start to finish. I've talked with other GTW retirees who remember him as a real, common-sense, easy to work with kind of guy.

\$16.50 paperback, or available as a download to Kindle. Get all four!

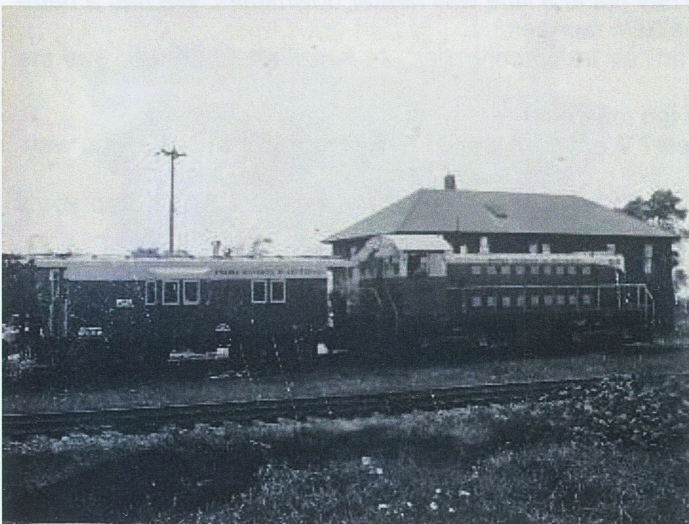


ACQUISITIONS: THE ROUNDHOUSE; AND WE'RE STILL WAITING

## SUMMER 1948: NEW CABOOSES!

Nearly three years after receiving the new engines #51 and #52 from the American Locomotive Company, two new steel bay window cabooses from General Equipment Company, joined the fleet, and numbered to match. These were ordered to replace the elderly PM wooden cabooses, obtained 2nd hand from the PM, in 1942 by William Boyd. These elderly A-400 series, built in the early 1920s, were then over 20 years old. Bet the boys were smiling wide as they entered these brand, spanking new units!

These rare pictures come out of a photo album of May Duffy, wife of James E. Duffy.



*First lashup, #52s*



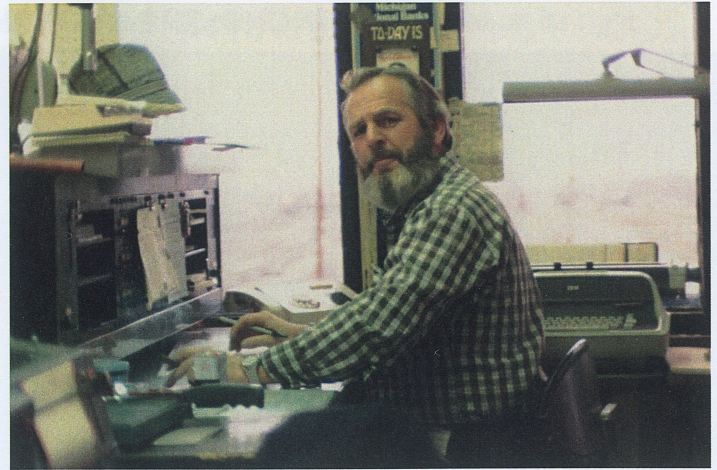
*A rare never published interior shot in a brand new caboose*

## TAPPAN TOWER & THE PH&D

Robert J. Carlisle was the long-serving operator up in the interlocking tower at Tappan Junction. He controlled all trains into and out of Port Huron and, by extension, into Canada. Additionally, he had jurisdiction over two subdivisions within the Port Huron yard, the Fort Gratiot subdivision heading north, and the Mount Clemons sub coming in from Detroit. He also allowed access for two connecting railroads, the Pere Marquette/Chesapeake & Ohio and the Port Huron & Detroit Railroads.

In this exclusive interview, Bob shares how it all worked on a daily basis, with as many as 16 trains coming and going in an 8 hour shift. Additionally, we learn how the PH&DRR fit into this mélange, a daily train which he called "the Salt Train".

He's in his 80s now and thoroughly enjoyed going back to remember the "good old days".



*Robert Carlisle finishing his last day as one of the few remaining Interlocking Tower Operators on the Grand Trunk.*

ML: When did your first sign on with the Grand Trunk Western?

BC: *It was 1957. I signed on as a telegraph operator back when they were still using Morse Code! Not much Morse Code; just enough to get by. There were no vacancies up here in Port Huron, but there was one down in Griffith, Indiana. So I commuted using the trains. Every week, I'd had two days off. I stayed down there all winter and then I got bumped. ("Bumped": someone with higher seniority could request your job) So I came back and worked the "spare board" between Port Huron and Chicago. Sometimes they would throw in the Agent's duties selling tickets, handling Railway Express parcels; I did all that.*

ML: Being on the "spare board", meant they could call you and put you where they wanted you.

BC: *Yep. I came back and they put me up at Tappan. First job was midnights. Right around 1958. I got married in 1958 and I was still on the "spare board".*

ML: Same job title?

BC: *Pretty much. Except they added what they called a "Leverman". Up there in the tower were 44 levers that controlled the yard switches.*

ML: I imagine they had to be in good working order.

BC: *Yeah. They had to lubricate them all the time and, in the winter time, get the brooms out and sweep the snow off.*

ML: The switches weren't heated then?

BC: *No, not for the first twenty or thirty years but, as time went on, they did have some heated switches, and you'd request 'em to turn on the heat, and they'd do it, all the way from Battle Creek. The ones with gas burners were just in recent years. But the sweepers would have to work sometimes round the clock in the winter time, especially when it got deep.*

ML: Was it warm up there in the winter?

BC: *Yep. We had an oil furnace down in the basement. One register upstairs, a big one.*

ML: Hot and cold water?

BC: *Not at first. But when I got on days, I requested hot water. They put in a little wall heater downstairs. We had a bathroom downstairs and that way we kept the ice from forming in the bath facilities.*

ML: As an Operator up in Tappan Tower, you were similar to an "air traffic controller". In fact, Tappan Tower was the "gateway" for incoming and outgoing trains.

BC: *Incoming and outgoing, lots of train orders for the trains leaving town.*

ML: What was the procedure for, say, a train scheduled to go west? Were you notified by phone? Did they give you way-bills?

BC: *Nope. There was no paperwork. I was notified that there would be a train ordered for a certain time. Then you'd have to handle the crew with the train dispatcher and he would put out train orders. This was all out of Tappan.*

ML: And the Yardmaster? What part did he play?

BC: *There were two Yardmasters. One for the west bound, or "top end" yard at Michigan Road, and the other for the east bound yard at "32", 32nd Street. The 32nd Street Yardmaster would handle the inbound trains. I'd call him and see where they wanted to "yard" their trains. Then I would give those orders to the train crew. Later years, we had radios. Before that, we had to "hoop" up. They'd come by Tappan slow enough to grab the "hoop" and then go in. ("Hooping up" meant the operator holding a "y" shaped pole with train orders fastened with a string allowing the conductor to lean out and grab the orders)*

ML: Did you handle passenger operations as well?

BC: *No, that was all handled at the depot. I knew pretty much when they were scheduled based on timetables. 'Course you had three trains in each direction. Those were the good old days!*

ML: For example, with an east bound passenger train, would you have the yard lined for its arrival?

BC: Both yardmasters would know and have the main cleared into the tunnel depot.

ML: And this would work for the westbound passenger trains as well?

BC: Right.

ML: You really had to be on your toes with so much coming and going, what with both passenger and freight.

BC: *Yep, there were actually three passenger trains daily in each direction, six. It's been a long time, but, if I remember right, we had a train that would leave around 11:00 o'clock in the afternoon and one that would leave in the middle of the night around 2:30 in the morning. That was the "hot" train which had about 5 stops between Port Huron and Chicago. And then you had good old "17", the day train, that left around mid-day for Chicago. So you got three west bounds and you gotta have three more coming back.*

ML: By the 1960s, that got reduced where you had a west-bound passenger train that left the Tunnel station just after 11:00 o'clock at night. Then you had a train coming in, in the morning, right?

BC: *Yep. "6" coming in. That's what I used to ride back and forth from Indiana. "6" would stop at every town on the line including Goodells. It handled the mail.*

ML: Up at Tappan, there must have been a lot of paperwork coming in and going out.

BC: *The trains would throw off a consist (list) as they'd leave town that would be transmitted. These were 24hr train sheets. We'd record all the information on both inbound and outbound as well as the passenger trains too, engine numbers.*

ML: Were you on days at this time?

BC: *I worked shift work for 12 years, then the rest, 28, 29 years, I was on days. After that, they removed the tower.*

ML: Did they remove Tappan because of the introduction of CTC (Centralized Traffic Control)?

BC: *Probably. The only thing about that was that we inspected the trains as they left town and could stop them if we saw something we didn't like. Then you'd notify the train dispatcher if there was trouble and he'd "knock the signal down" (display red, preventing entry west, into the next "block"). Not "in their face" but he wouldn't let 'em out of town.. When they took Tappan down, that changed things.*

ML: As the daytime tower operator, you were also aware of the inbound PM/C&O which had to cross over both GTW mains. How would you know when they'd come in?

BC: *Well, they'd show up on the chart for one thing. It was a large chart on the wall called the "Manipulation Chart", which covered from Tappan Tower to the river (The "chart" was a lighted board covering the Port Huron yard and approach).*

*And then they'd call the tower for signals using their whistle. So I'd hear 'em whistle when they got close. There was no schedule; I'd just handle them when they came in. Then, when they would be ready to leave town, they'd call for a signal and I'd give them a green when ready so they could cross over the diamonds. I'd give them a green from up in Tappan.*

*I operated all the stacked signals and the switches. The signals at Tappan for eastbound trains would be to get 'em into the yard over Michigan Road. Then that was the end of our control. Coming into town, they'd "hit our board" at Wadhams Road. Course you knew where all the trains were all the time. Other operators would tell one another what time*

*they (their trains) got by. You could listen in to the main line circuit, to the dispatchers.*

*Those were busy times back then. I used to handle as many as 16 trains in an 8 hour shift. That would be in both directions. I didn't have hardly any time to eat lunch!*

ML: You mentioned when you first started out, you knew Morse Code. Obviously that changed later on. Did Tappan have a teletype machine?

BC: *It did before my time. Then they sent all the teletypes down to the depot. They had a whole bunch of 'em down there. We had what they called "telex"; we had to operate that in our spare time, which we didn't have. So finally, the company woke up. You'd be doin' a little on the telex, then you'd do a couple or three trains, then you got train orders which have to be, as you know, exact. If you dotted the "I" wrong, why, you're in trouble. So then after telex, we went to radio. I had four channels. We had Trains, Section men, Communications, and Signal Maintainer. So I had four channels, then two train dispatchers who would*



*Bob Carlisle in sunglasses*



*Operator Rob Carlisle descends the stairway for the last time. PH&D Trainmaster in white at the bottom of the stairs,*

keep you busy, one at Durand and one at Battle Creek.

ML: Up in the Tower, when you were working days, you could see the afternoon job from the PH&D coming west up toward their Michigan Road yard.

BC: We used to call it the "Salt Train" because of all the salt loads from Morton (Salt) and the Diamond (Crystal Salt). I'd notify our crews that "the Salt's Up" and they'd know when to come out to accept the interchange from you guys. Your train would cross Michigan Road into our interchange track to leave loads.

ML: Did they require permission from you?

BC: No. They had their own GTW switch key to open a switch.

ML: Did our conductors ever come up to you in the tower for any reason.

BC: Not with those trains. We did have more with the coal trains, since we had to change crews. The PH&D crew would come up to find out what time the coal train was due in. With the day job, I'd see the PH&D bringing loads up and our yardmaster would notify me that we'd be going to get 'em. The PH&D would notify 32nd Street, so that's when we'd send out a crew. The Yardmaster at 32nd would call out a crew. It could have also been the Top End Yardmaster as well.

ML: Was it your job to tell them that deliveries had been spotted? How would the 32nd Street yard office know?

BC: No. Apparently the PH&D would notify 32nd Street what time.

ML: How would the Grand Trunk crew know when to head out to pick up our interchange?

BC: Their boss was the yardmaster at 32nd and would instruct them. And maybe it wouldn't be necessarily from 32nd; sometimes it would be the yardmaster at the top end. See we had two yards, the eastbound yard and the westbound yard. It was busy, no doubt about that.

ML: The GTW interchange track would likely be filled with loads brought up by our night crew. Would you notify 32nd or a train crew that those loads were there?

BC: No, they were probably notified by the crew that put 'em there or the office staff at PH&D. If we made a delivery to the PH&D, the yard crew or the yardmaster would notify the PH&D. That wasn't handled at all by Tappan, except we would throw the switches to get 'em in and out of there on our side.

ML: Where were those switches?

BC: Well you see a yard engine would come out of the yard and onto the Detroit Division.

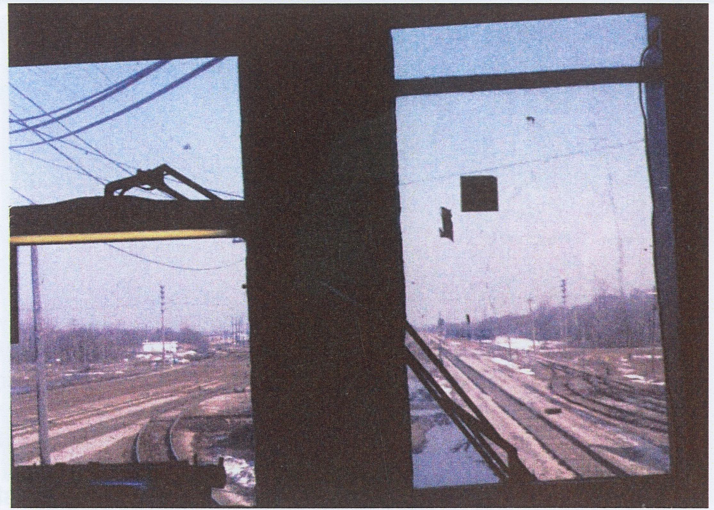
ML: Which was the Mt. Clemens subdivision. Did you have a lever for that yard?

BC: Oh yeah. We had trains every day out there.

ML: Were there signals covering the entry into Port Huron off the Mt. Clemens sub?

BC: Yeah, from Mt. Clemens, they went through two sets of crossovers to get into the yard. We took care of that since the signal was west of us. Boy, when you think back, I've been retired 26 years. So there was a lot of responsibility and a lot of work.

ML: Like to thank you for these great memories, Bob. Good times back then.



On the right, the PM/C&O main parallels the PH&DRR yard and GTW interchange. At left, the GTW Mt. Clemens Subdivision curves onto the GTW main line.



## INTERVIEW PART III: BRUCE SAWDON

We continue our interview with Bruce Sawdon, one of the last remaining PH&DRR engineers.

## Part Three

ML: With the PH&D "Specials" downline: was it usually you and Ray Warsinski working that job?

BS: Yes, usually. We'd stop just south of Chartier in Marine City. They had a pole with two transformers and they had cable which we could reach over there and plug into.

ML: When you were ready to had back north, had you already turned the coach?

BS: No, we never turned it. We'd use the passing track to run around the coach and then come back north with the long end forward.

I remember, who was it, Jim (Duffy)? One time, we took Jim out. We stopped on by the Windmill Curve. And the people all wanted to see the coach. It was a nice afternoon. Talk about Jim, on South Boulevard, there's a big stop sign, and I'd blow for all of 'em. Woman was deaf and she run right into us. The police come. "Didn't you blow?" they asked. I said, "yes". "Well there's no lights on side of the engine." I said, "what's the big sign say? Stop!" Jim was up with there drinks and they went all over the place! He didn't use the coach as much as George (Duffy). He had that gold lamp in the office with leaves.

ML: When the railroad was sold, a few of the employees stayed on with CSX. How was that transition? Did you have to undergo a retraining in a "probation" period?

BS: Seems to me we went down to Tennessee. I remember there was a guy representing the CSX. The room was all full with PH&D employees. (John) Sladowski and (John) Leitz, who were on the track gang, asked if they were getting anything. The guy said, "You don't get nothing." I can remember that plain as day. The section gang never had no union representative. That's why I stayed in Port Huron; I was a "protected employee". Otherwise, I'd end up down in Jacksonville (CSX Headquarters) in a roundhouse.

ML: In the case of the section gang, CSX could send them anywhere they wanted.

BS: Yep.

ML: Were you trained on larger engines?

BS: Yes. They were GP-9s, 2000 horsepower.

ML: Was that much of a step up?

BS: Well, a "step up" was when I was runnin' a coal train and this young Roadmaster, he was over the engineers. You go down the line and you're getting in maybe 6 units and 150 coal cars, 80 tons each. Your dad was standing between the crossings at Marysville at Electric (Ave), and I remember him hollerin', "Open 'er up! Open 'er up!" can still see him there.

It's like anything else, you get the feel of it. With that many cars, you got a lot of slack. Going up Chryslers, you're opening it up, behind Dows, well then you're going down (grade) and you got so you could watch your ampmeter. Well then I used the dynamic brake. It's using your electricity to reverse your power or your current on your traction motors, that would slow you down.

Charley Brennan wanted that job; he thought it was a pretty good deal. You go down there and come back with the empties. I don't know if it was the first or second time, he took 'em down and he dumped the cars off at Yankee Road, There's probably coal still layin' there in the ditch. Yep. They were all in a hurry... "oh that's a good job." Like Tom King, they took over with C&O, "Hell yeah, I'm gonna run that, I'm gonna bump you off on the PH&D". He went down, I don't know it he was going down one winter, and the mudrail was filled with dirt, it hadn't been cleaned, and the old engine just a bouncing' and that was

enough for Tom. He didn't want nothin' to do with it. He was a real nice guy though.

ML: Did you keep your seniority when you joined the CSX?

BS: No, I was just a "protected employee". A couple of guys had more seniority than me, but I've got the vacation. I've got 4 or 5 weeks vacation and you can't do nothing' about that. "Well, I'm going to work the day job!

One guy, Ron, he worked on the boat. One time, there was an engine in there and it was idling, spittin' oil all over. I told Ron, "I can't use that." He went out and got rags and wiped it all down off the catwalk. He was quite a guy, a hillbilly, real pleasant.

ML: When you came back from training, were you assigned the PH&D segment?

BS: No, I don't think I was.

ML: Did you work in the yard?

BS: Yeah. I was down loading the boats. I remember loading the boats and Stu Biggs, he was over the District, Canadian, he was real pleasant. They were loading it across the way and they didn't have it anchored down and it started to split and they dropped a tank down! Stu was up by the yard there and oh boy, "that's a nice birch tree by the drive", and they said "We could load it into a boxcar and let you know what one it's in". He said that what would happen was the Customs guy who'd check it and somebody would be in trouble.

ML: Was or old buddy Butch Fuller around?

BS: Yep, he was the Yardmaster at Court Street. Old Butch, he'd just shake his head. They had some form sittin' there if you wanted to take a "buy-out". So that night, when we was done, I told Butch, "You be sure Roy looks at this." I'd signed it and filled it all in. He thought I was quittin'! Yeah, it was altogether different than the PH&D. But I survived it.

ML: Did you have to adjust to the scrutiny of people looking over your shoulder?

BS: Yeah, after you worked all your life, you're making your own rules for the benefit of the Company, and then you get people coming around that were standing behind a tank in the yard watchin' us. Somebody on the barge radioed us, and told us, "You're bein' watched." It was a big circle.

ML: Well you had to answer to a large corporation. What made you decide to quit?

BS: I retired. How old was I? 62? I don't remember to be honest. I don't know if I decided that was enough. Something happened, the rules or something. But, like I say, I was a "protected employee" so they couldn't force me out of Port Huron. The only time I went was when they came in with a coal train and they tipped it over in Marlette. I had to go up there and the crew. Had to have somebody to ride the line over with us.

They had "Sarge" they called him. He was a conductor. He was miserable with the guys. He carried a pistol with him. Williams, who was a supervisor found out and they canned him out. Don't think he ever got back. That's like, I had in my locker, I had, engines would come over with extra stuff on 'em, maybe an extra phone or a reverser. So I had one of each in my locker. Well, Williams there, he pulled a smart one and checked all the lockers and found 'em. I explained that the Canadians sometimes send an engine over and they don't have... "No! You ain't supposed to have that!" Same as Chuck Carnegie, he was a clerk there and he kept the place pretty clean. And I don't know if he slipped; he had his wedding ring on, caught the top edge of his locker and tore his finger. Well, that ended it. You can't wear no rings or nothing. You had to have steel-toed shoes. Yeah, they can clamp down sometimes. Course you got some guys now, they just ask for it.

BS: We had a Trainmaster at the PH&D. He can't take numbers fast enough! You remember that, coming around there with the empties? It was a good life and I can't complain, I guess.

ML: Well Bruce, we sure like to hear those old tales. Let's do this again!

### Matching the Prototype: GTW Epilogue

*Marker Light* reader Matthew Sturgell recently contacted me offering some very helpful data, following up on those GTW cars covered in the "Matching the Prototype" articles. He also suggested a useful source on GTW cars, which can be found at <http://www.nakina.net/cdn/gtw.html>. He helped the GTW Historical Society update their HO Scale Modelers Guide.

**113700-113874** series hoppers. Bowser produced a model of this series of cars, item 55635." He notes that there are two for sale on Ebay, 113704 and 113746.

**138100-138199** series hoppers. Accurail produced a model of this series of cars, items 20140 and 20141. There are several of these for sale on ebay, one with a stock road number. Accurate Finishing also made a model of this series of cars many years ago. I found a couple for sale on ebay; one of the item numbers is 1036.

**309400-309499** series box cars. I don't have any information on this series...and to my knowledge, there are no models available.

**595000-595949** series box cars. You mentioned finding 595382 on ebay which I believe is an Athearn Bev-Bel model. Atlas also produced models of this car, items 20002453 and 20001454.

**599812-599932** series box cars. These were PS 50' double-door boxcars. I'm not sure of any exact models of this series, but Accurail items 5226 and 5902 are both reasonably close matches. For a more accurate model, you could custom paint Intermountain's PS Double Door box car.

Modeling the PH&DRR with a closer adherence to actual prototype practices rewards the operator/modeler. Having this knowledge helps make that experience more "legit" and rewarding. A tip of the Kromer to Matt and The Grand Trunk Western Historical Society for sharing this with us!

### CARRY YOUR CARD

Renewing a membership to this so-called "Tunnel City" outfit will still allow you access to the yard. \$30 to 2100 32nd Street.

	PORT HURON and DETROIT RAILROAD CO. - St. Clair Blue Water Route -
	<b>PORT HURON &amp; DETROIT RAILROAD          HISTORICAL SOCIETY</b> <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. Those with PH&DRRHS membership cards must, if requested, present their cards to authorized personnel from either CN, CSX, Homeland Security, or St. Clair County Sheriff's Department officers. When visiting, please stay on the west side of the yellow line. Do not enter the roundhouse since it remains dangerous and injury is possible.

"Performance not Personality"

Paying more attention to the latter will doom any organization.

The PH&DRR Historical Society was formed in 2008 to honor and remember this unique Michigan short line. The Society was incorporated as a State and Federal non profit organization with three purposes in mind.

It's important to keep honoring these original purposes. These paragraphs were carefully and thoughtfully crafted, with each specific in meaning and not an effort in haste.

The *Marker Light* will continue uphold them and remain true to the history and legacy of the PH&DRR.

#### The Purpose of

#### *The Port Huron & Detroit Railroad Historical Society :*

*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.*

**The *Marker Light* is printed and mailed free of charge, to those who would prefer to continue receiving news and articles about the PH&DRR. Email [whlrydr@aol.com](mailto:whlrydr@aol.com) to be added to the mailing list. Chose either .PDF or hard copy.**