

The Passenger Trains of Grand Trunk Western

by Elbert Simon



At the end of its 515-mile overnight run from Toronto on Canadian National and U.S. subsidiary Grand Trunk Western, the International approaches Chicago's Dearborn Station behind a GTW GP9/GP18 duo at 21st Street in August 1967. Several cars still wear Canadian National's pre-1961 green, black, and gold colors. Mike Schafer

tunnel between Port Huron, Mich., and Sarnia, Ont. A secondary passenger route linked Detroit to the Lake Michigan ports of Grand Haven and Muskegon, Mich., and GTW car ferries linked the latter point with Milwaukee. The Detroit–Pontiac, Mich., segment of this route also handled commuter service, as well as connecting service beyond to Durand, Mich., the intersection with GTW’s Port Huron–Chicago route.

The railroad, in its early years known as the Chicago & Grand Trunk, stitched together a route that reached Chicago by 1882. Initially, some segments of the route relied on trackage rights over competing railroads, but later construction built a route completely under Grand Trunk control. The line to Grand Haven was the first railroad linking Detroit and Pontiac and was acquired with its parent, the Great Western Railway, by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1882. The Grand Trunk Western name resulted from reorganization of the Grand Trunk Railway’s Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois lines in 1900. It was not yet an official name, but rather a description of its territory. Grand Trunk Western became the corporate name in 1928, five years after the financially troubled Grand Trunk had become part of the new Canadian National Railways.

Durand, Mich., was the literal crossroads of Grand Trunk Western operations, where the Chicago–Port Huron main line, the main line linking Detroit with Muskegon and Grand Haven, and the route to Bay City intersected. The station also served the Ann Arbor Railroad. library of congress



Opened in 1891 with steam locomotives hauling trains through the bore, the 6,025-foot St. Clair Tunnel trackage between Port Huron, Mich., and Sarnia, Ont., was electrified in 1908 following two tragic accidents. Paired Baldwin-Westinghouse box-cabs such as these worked until 1958, when the operation was fully dieselized. In this ca. 1910 view, a short passenger

There were many other corporate changes in Canada—and subsequently on the GTW itself—but I’m limiting the coverage here to the period of GTW passenger service spanning from the depression of the 1930s to the early Amtrak years.



The days of electric operation through the St. Clair Tunnel were numbered by the mid-1950s, with dieselization of GTW’s passenger and freight operations almost complete. bernard rossbach



GTW lent an international flair to Dearborn Station's already cosmopolitan mix of railroads. With Santa Fe and Erie trains in the background—the outbound Kansas Cityan at far left, the Texas Chief, and the equipment for Erie's Lake Cities being set in the station by a Chicago & Western Indiana locomotive—the Maple Leaf departs behind No. 6320. jim scribbins, milwaukee road historical association collection

For most of that period, G. W. operated a line of round-trip passenger trains over the Chicago–Port Huron main line. The principal stations on this line were Valparaiso and South Bend, Ind., Lansing, Durand, and Flint, Mich. In 1944, at the peak of World War II, the pattern of service was as follows, with Dearborn Station serving as the Chicago terminal:

Eastbound



A streamlined Class U4-b 4-8-4 heads up this day's eastbound Maple Leaf, train 20, about to slam over the crossings of the Erie Railroad, Chesapeake & Ohio, and Elgin, Joliet & Eastern at Griffith, Ind., on May 5, 1954. Some 40 miles out of Chicago, Griffith was long a favored place for train-watching and today yields a modest railroad park. bernard rossbach

Depart Chicago 7:10am

Coaches: Chicago–Montreal, Chicago–Detroit

Compartment parlor car: Chicago–Port Huron

Diner: Chicago–Port Huron

Linking Canada's two largest cities with Chicago, the International Limited was one of the Canadian National system's most important passenger trains. This late-1920s brochure promoted the train's speed and "double track all the way" route. Kevin J. Holland collection

Train 14

International Limited, Chicago–Toronto

Depart Chicago 8pm

Coaches: Chicago–Toronto

1 drawing room–2 compartment–3 single bedroom-buffet lounge: Chicago–Toronto

12 section-2 bedroom sleeper: Chicago–Toronto

12 section-2 bedroom sleeper: Detroit–Toronto

Train 6

Depart Chicago 11pm

Coaches: Chicago–Toronto

Coaches: Chicago–Detroit

12 section–1 drawing room sleeper:

Chicago–Lansing

12 section–1 drawing room sleeper:

Chicago–Port Huron

8 section–drawing room–2 compartment

sleeper: Chicago–Detroit

Buffet-parlor: Chicago–Battle Creek

Buffet-parlor: Detroit–Toronto

Westbound

Train 5

La Salle, Toronto–Detroit/Chicago

Arrive Detroit 12:15am; Chicago 7am

Same equipment as the Inter-City Limited,

minus the buffet-parlor car

Train 15

Arrive Chicago 8:10pm

Same equipment as train 14, except for a

buffet-parlor from Battle Creek



We're at Port Huron in September 1955 as the westbound Inter-City Limited, train 17 from Montreal and Toronto, undergoes its electric-for-steam motive power exchange. From here to Chicago, 4-8-4 No. 6326 will be in charge of getting the Inter-City Limited to Dearborn Station on time.
bernard rossbach

Train 17

Inter-City Limited, Toronto–Detroit/Chicago

Arrive Chicago 8:10pm

FROM TORONTO

All Detroit cars were handled by connecting trains between Durand and Detroit. There were also day and overnight trains between Detroit and the ferry at Muskegon. The day train carried a parlor-buffet car while the night trains carried a 12 section-drawing room sleeper.

Equipment

The first new postwar CN sleepers leased to Pullman for U.S. operation came in 1950. These were 24-duplex-roomette cars named in the “I” series, with several assigned to a Toronto–Chicago Pullman car line.

A large number of new CN sleepers arrived from Pullman-Standard in 1954, including several in the “E” series (8 duplex roomette–4 bedroom–4 section) and *Green*-series (6 section–4 bedroom–6 roomette) also leased to the Pullman Company for U.S. service. New lightweight *Cape*-series 2 bedroom–2 compartment cars replaced the previous sleeper-lounge.

In January 1966, the few remaining sleepers reverted to CN operation, as Pullman ceased to operate the few remaining GTW car lines. Only one sleeper and a sleeper-lounge remained. For the most part, the CN sleeper-lounge cars were replaced by former Nickel Plate Road five bedroom–buffet lounge cars *City of Chicago* and *City of Cleveland* (both had been leased by CN beginning in 1966), while one CN sleeper was usually a former Frisco car with 14 roomettes and 4 bedrooms, in CN’s *Falls* series. Chicago–Lansing and Chicago–Port Huron cars were next to go, and sleepers between Chicago and Detroit followed in 1967.

CN lunch-counter diners were substituted. This illustrates the point that cars from parent CN often formed the majority of the train consists on the Chicago–Port Huron run, since coaches and sleepers ran through to Toronto and Montreal.

Commuter service

The Detroit area was, and still is, an important generator of freight traffic for CN's former GTW trackage serving eastern Michigan. However, GTW commuter service came late and never really expanded beyond a few rush-hour trains. Suburban service on the GTW died in the 1980s when state support was withdrawn.

Commuter service did not begin until August 1931. From Brush Street Station in midtown Detroit, trains headed north, then west before passing through famous Milwaukee Junction—several lines of several railroads intersected there—and heading through some well-heeled suburbs to Pontiac. Among these stops were Highland Park, Ferndale, Royal Oak, and Birmingham.

In 1944, two Detroit–Pontiac trains were scheduled for daily-except-Sunday operation. One Saturday train was replaced with a schedule just after noon to accommodate commuters who worked a half day, which was quite common at the time. Almost four years later, only three trains ran each way from Monday through Friday. There was a rush-hour train and the two Muskegon trains until a train to Durand was added.



What may be train 21 appears to be ready to set forth from Detroit's Brush Street Station on April 30, 1959, for its five-plus hour, 194-mile journey across the state to Grand Rapids and Muskegon. Ken Donnelly collection

My first job after college was with General Motors in Warren, Mich. When time permitted, I would drive over to Birmingham, Mich., to watch the commuter trains. The station there was built in 1930 as part of a line relocation and featured high-level platforms. It closed in 1978 and now houses a restaurant. Amtrak trains that now use former GTW lines stop nearby at the Troy Transit Center.

With many demands on the components of the newly formed CN system in the 1920s, frugality was the watchword. New coaches were out of the question. As it happened, the Pullman Company was rapidly moving toward an all-steel fleet of first-ranked cars. Pullman embarked on a program to upgrade wooden sleepers built around the turn of the century, for continued service. The company devised a plan to steel-plate the cars and rebuild them as coaches. In

a group of 28 cars numbered from 4850–4877. All were air-conditioned in 1937–38 and considered first-class coaches. In later years they were usually found in commuter service.

In 1937, CN acquired 50 streamlined coaches numbered 5180–5229, and followed it up with an additional 25 cars in 1942, numbered 5283–5307. All of these cars rode on six-wheel trucks.

To cope with wartime traffic, CN acquired surplus cars from Pullman for conversion to coaches and troop sleepers. Twenty-eight former Pullman cars became CN coaches in 1941 (Nos. 5255–5282), joined by Nos. 5308–5381 in 1942. Individual coaches were purchased new by CN in 1942, 1947, 1950, and 1954, freeing up some of the converted Pullmans to go to the GTW.

In 1954–55, CN transferred coaches 5308–5327 to GTW. Cars 5328–5333 had already been transferred soon after conversion in 1943. This series was used extensively on commuter trains in the mid-1960s, and occasionally could be seen on mainline trains.

As the 1960s wound down, GTW took steps to upgrade its commuter fleet. Union Pacific was selling cars it didn't need as a result of declining services, so in 1969 GTW purchased 18 streamlined coaches from UP. Those that were renumbered 4800–4806 by GTW were built by American Car & Foundry in 1953. Cars 4807–4817 had been built by Pullman-Standard for UP in 1950. Of these cars, 4800–4809 retained their long-distance configuration of 44 seats. These cars were assigned to mainline service until it ended in 1971; after that, they were seen on commuter service until they were sold to the Southeastern Michigan Transit Authority (SEMTA) in 1977.

applied to the cars using large white letters. SEMTA replaced the low-capacity coaches with 12 cars purchased in 1977 from Penn Central. These cars were built for the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1949 by the Budd Company as sleepers; PRR rebuilt them as coaches in 1963. They were renumbered by SEMTA as 101–112 and they, too, carried the names of regional locations.

SEMTA service was operated between Detroit and Pontiac with three trainsets until the state withdrew funding in October 1983. Beginning in January 1984, the cars were leased to New York's MTA.



GTW's Brush Street Station, Detroit, in September 1965. Charles Geletzke

Terminals

GTW's principal facilities were located in Chicago, Pontiac, Durand, and Detroit. The Detroit terminal at Brush Street was located just northeast of the downtown area, near the waterfront. It was modest but sufficient for GTW's

Pontiac was the layover point for commuter trains. Ironically, a new transit center was opened in 1983, just months before the service ended.

Durand featured a grand station at the intersection of the Detroit–Muskegon/Grand Haven main line and the Chicago–Port Huron main line. Detroit–Durand connecting trains met mainline trains here and were serviced here during layover.



At an unidentified location believed to be Pontiac, Mich., in the mid-1950s, what appears to be one of the local trains on the Detroit–Durand line enters a passing track to meet an opposing train. GTW was one of the last of U.S. Class I railroads to use steam in mainline service. jim scribbins/milwaukee road historical society collection

coach-yard facilities between 49th and 51st streets. C&WI's fleet of Alco RS-1 road-switchers provided switching support.



GTW had no passenger-service F-units of its own, but members of parent CN's fleet operated to and from Chicago in the last few years before Amtrak. This is the International arriving Chicago in the late 1960s. Mike Schafer

Locomotives

The steam-era GTW possessed a number of 4-6-2 Pacific types (the standard-bearer passenger steam locomotive of the early 20th Century) and one order of 4-8-2 Mountain-type steam locomotives. But, like its parent Canadian

and 25 U-3-b's built in 1942–43, both from Alco and numbered in the 6300 series. They all had 73-inch drivers and were considered to be dual-service (passenger and freight) locomotives. The queens of the fleet were the U-4-b engines, Nos. 6405–6410, built by the Lima Locomotive Works in 1938. They were a streamlined design similar to the five U-4-a engines built by Montreal Locomotive Works in 1936 for CN. They were able to reach higher speeds than the previous two GTW classes.

GTW was an early purchaser of diesels for switching, and also acquired 22 Electro-Motive F3 units in 1948 for freight service. However, not until 1954 did GTW address dieselization of its passenger service, purchasing GP-series locomotives from the Electro-Motive Division of General Motors. Two GP9s arrived in August 1954, numbered 4900 and 4901. Widespread replacement of steam in GTW passenger service began in January 1957 with six additional GP9s numbered 4907–4912. They were followed by 4930–4933 in November 1958.

Steam was now retrenched to Detroit–Pontiac runs. The final farewell occurred on March 29, 1960, when two Detroit–Pontiac special trains totaling 37 cars were hauled by 6300-series Northerns. This move was made possible by the arrival of three GP18s in March 1960 numbered 4950–4952. In common with GTW's earlier passenger-service GP9s, these units had large fuel/water tanks and rooftop air tanks.

Meanwhile, an exception to the EMD rule was made with the arrival of the last Alco RS-1s built for domestic service, delivered to GTW in late 1957 and equipped for passenger service.



It's August 1966 and the U.S. is enduring a national airline strike, prompting passenger train consists to swell from coast to coast. Wearing its original pre-1961 CN family colors, GTW GP9 No. 4922 and two mates lead the arriving International into Chicago following its overnight trek from

both, Mike Schafer

Car history

We have already discussed the 4800- and 5300-series coaches rebuilt initially as first-class coaches but later obligated to largely commuter duties. With parent CN providing most of the cars assigned to the Toronto–Chicago trains, there was little need for GTW to acquire new coaches.

Accordingly, only two new acquisitions were funded, one in 1950 and one in 1953. First, six coaches built by Pullman in 1930 for the Chesapeake & Ohio were acquired and numbered 4878–4883, above the earlier cars. They were originally built for C&O subsidiary Pere Marquette. Five coaches were purchased from Pullman-Standard in 1953. Numbered 4884–4888, they were assigned to the Chicago–Toronto trains.

In 1967, GTW inaugurated the innovative *Mohawk*, a fast, limited-stops afternoon/evening service between Chicago and Detroit. Two coaches were rebuilt to provide food service on the new trains, which rarely exceeded four cars, and for which a single GP9 or GP18 was sufficient. Initially the two former Bangor & Aroostook sleepers, *Green Gable* and *Greenock*, provided first-class service but were replaced by GTW lightweight parlor-buffet cars *Diamond Lake* and *Silver Lake*, which had been working on *Maple Leaf* consists. These cars worked with GTW lightweight food-service coaches 4884 and 4885 and one of the 4886–4888-series coaches on latter-day *Mohawk* runs. The two GTW parlor-buffets were built by Pullman-Standard in 1954 for the day trains between Chicago and Toronto. When they did a turn on the

windows after World War II. In future years, there was only one diner route, a Chicago–Lansing turn. This normally used the assigned CN car 1346, built by Pullman-Standard in 1954. The last of a series of standard parlor-buffet cars was GTW 890, *Indian Lake*.



Because the Trunk's new Mohawk run between Chicago and Detroit was an evening train in both directions, relatively few photos of it have surfaced over the years. In this scene on Chicago's South Side, Detroit-bound Mohawk No. 164 has just met a GTW steam excursion train heading back into the city in July 1968. The Mohawk's competition in this evening time slot was Penn Central trains 356 and 357, formerly New York Central's Twilight Limited. Mike Schafer

Into the Amtrak's era

at least the eastern portion of it—the state-supported *Blue Water*, inaugurated Sept. 15, 1974. A year later, the name was changed to *Blue Water Limited*.

Because the traditional GTW route out of Chicago was somewhat circuitous, heading southwest and then west into Chicago's South Side before arcing eastward through Blue Island, Harvey, Thornton Junction, Valparaiso, South Bend, and Cassiopolis, Mich., Amtrak chose a more direct routing between Chicago and Battle Creek. Instead, the *Blue Water* followed the more traditional routing of Amtrak's former New York Central/Michigan Central trains between Chicago and Detroit. However, at Battle Creek, where the GTW intersected Penn Central's ex-NYC Chicago–Detroit main line, the *Blue Water* gained GTW rails to serve Lansing, Durand, Flint, Lapeer, and Port Huron. The train, at various times, used almost any type of car Amtrak rostered: conventional, Turboliners, and Amfleet.

In October 1982, the trains were extended as a joint Amtrak-VIA operation, the *International*, between Chicago and Toronto. Unfortunately, delays at the U.S.–Canada border crossing resulted in contraction of the service to a domestic Amtrak operation in April 2004.

Today, thanks to the support of Michigan, the *Blue Water* continues to serve much of central Michigan.

El Simon has been a contributor to PTJ since the 1970s. A foremost passenger-car historian, El resides in the Philadelphia area.

Working for the Grand Trunk Western

By Kevin McKinney

that claim. It was a mid-sized Midwestern property, not a large system, a locale and size I liked. At that point in my life, as a freshman at Michigan State University, it was the major local railroad, and the one I used for travel between Lansing and home in Chicago.

At the time I already had a number of pleasant GTW trips under my belt, starting in high school with a Chicago–South Bend day trip in a swivel chair parlor car (“club” car in CN’s more “modern” terminology) on the Toronto-bound Maple Leaf. Returning home from college orientation in the summer of 1966 it was, again, a comfortable club car journey from Lansing. Just weeks after starting my college adventure, I rode a Grand Trunk steam excursion between Detroit and Durand. In my freshman year at MSU, I watched Grand Trunk freight and passenger trains and a lengthy football special from the adjacent campus. I would also journey to downtown Lansing when possible to visit the passenger station on South Washington Street. That was not an easy trip without a car. One had to take a bus from East Lansing to downtown Lansing and another bus to the station which was located a mile south of downtown. More often the second segment involved walking, since the Lansing area bus service was on its last legs at the time.

The station agent was a pleasant, older gentleman named Earl Bennick (at the age of 18, almost everyone over 40 seemed “older”; he was probably in his mid-60s.) In lulls between selling tickets and answering the phone, he would tell me railroad stories, and I would tell him of my interest in trains. One of his stories involved why the senior baggageman on duty always quickly left the station, exiting on the north side away from the tracks, whenever a freight train came through. It seems he had been there in 1941, when a “fruit train” derailed, damaging the depot, killing a 13-year-old boy, and injuring 12 others.

never go away.

Three Geeps lead the Maple Leaf at South Bend, Ind., in 1964. all, Kevin McKinney

The first trip home from campus was two days before Thanksgiving on the overnight Mohawk, which had a Detroit–Chicago sleeper and contained a roomette I had booked weeks earlier, perhaps becoming the only MSU student that decade to travel in a sleeping car from campus to home. I was dropped off around midnight by my dorm’s resident assistant and had over two hours to take in the early morning activity. The station was open, but the ticket office was closed. Nearby there was activity at the REA Express building, as two express cars were being prepared for pick-up by the westbound Mohawk. To the south of the tracks the Diamond REO truck plant was quiet, but the neon sign proclaiming “The World’s Toughest Truck” was working. Eastbound and westbound freight trains livened the night. The eastbound International rolled in at 1:45am, with a lengthy consist of head-end cars, coaches and three sleepers for Toronto. At 2:25am, the Mohawk arrived, with a pair of Geeps, head-end cars, several coaches, and my sleeper. The two express cars were added by a local switcher and departure was on time at 2:45am. I believe I was the only passenger boarding the sleeper. Five-and-a-half sleep-filled hours later, the train arrived at Dearborn Station. Just two weeks later I repeated the process for Christmas vacation.

the International or Mohawk in the evening and arrive in Lansing, still five miles from the dorm, in the middle of the night. So the return was on New York Central's holiday-filled Twilight Limited to Jackson, the home town of one of my roommates was from. His father drove us the 40 miles from Jackson to campus.

Over the course of that first year, I visited the Lansing depot often enough that Mr. Bennick would let me hang around in the ticket office and even handle phone inquiries when he was busy ticketing someone at the window. I was already working for the Grand Trunk pro bono.

When spring term arrived, I started applying to a number of railroads for a summer job in Chicago, but my Number One choice was Grand Trunk. There was the possibility of a passenger department position in the City Ticket Office, which would be ideal. While waiting for a firm commitment another railroad responded with an offer. It was from the Pennsylvania (the Penn Central merger was eight months in the future) and the position was for an Assistant Signal Maintainer. I was never quite sure what the job entailed, perhaps painting signal boxes? I had a physical exam at Chicago Union Station from a PRR-approved doctor (no drug testing was involved back then, not that it would matter), but before proceeding to a job I was not overly enthused about, the offer from the Grand Trunk came through. I would be a reservation and ticket agent.

The summer of 1967 was a busy time for Grand Trunk and parent Canadian National. The trains were already popular due to CN's innovative "Red, White and Blue" fares, which pioneered discount rates for off-peak days, as well as from marketing and sales efforts in Canada and to a lesser extent in the United

Grand Trunk occupied the ninth floor at 105 West Adams Street in downtown Chicago, where the freight department had offices, and the passenger department was headquartered. The City Ticket Office was large enough to accommodate several year-round agents and the four of us who had been hired for the summer. I was the only “rail” person of the four, and I already knew the schedules and equipment. Thanks to spending time with Earl Bennick, I also knew my way around the large CN-GT tariff book.

People could enter office buildings back then without showing identification, obtaining passes from guards in the lobby, or walking through a metal detector. So a steady stream of people came through our ninth floor door, either to pick up tickets or inquire about future travel. Since we were part of CN, we handled a great deal of ticketing for the parent company. We sold tickets for the Super Continental and Panorama, CN’s two daily trains across Canada; for Windsor–Toronto, Toronto–Montreal, and other corridor trains; and for trains and ferries in eastern Canada. We even sold package tours that included whale-watching on Hudson Bay.

We sold interline tickets, as some people chose to travel by rail to reach CN trains at Winnipeg. And of course we sold numerous tickets from Chicago to Toronto and Montreal, and GTW destinations such as Battle Creek, Lansing, Flint, Detroit, and Port Huron. I pushed the Detroit sleeper as much as possible, but my bosses hinted that it was probably doomed, despite my best efforts. Our Detroit business was certainly not helped by the urban riots that consumed the Motor City that summer. At the peak of the disturbance, trains were halted at suburban Royal Oak, unable to reach the downtown Brush Street station (now the location of the Renaissance Center).

filling out a punch card with pencil markings. The card was then fed into a reader that transmitted the request to CN's mainframe computer in Toronto. In less than a minute (usually) a response came back on the teletype, which provided either a confirmation or a sold-out message. High-tech indeed.

Sleeping-car reservations were, at the time, too complicated to computerize, so they were made manually using diagram cards, one for each sleeping car line with a separate card for each day into the near future. Reservations were penciled in on specific rooms on the cards, and erased when cancelled. Chicago held most of the eastbound space and Toronto held most of the westbound space. We could quickly make a round-trip reservation if there was still space available on what "we held," but if our allotment was gone we had to call Canada. "Hello Toronto, Chicago here, do you have a bedroom available on 155 on the 18 July?"

The City Ticket Office was open from 8:30am to 5pm, Monday through Friday. At other times, phone inquiries or in-person ticket pick-ups were handled by Chicago & Western Indiana personnel at Dearborn Station. This meant that after closing, the sleeping-car diagrams had to be physically transferred to Dearborn. We took turns delivering the diagrams and, of course, I always enjoyed the task. Since it took about 15 minutes to walk the distance, anyone calling for a reservation between 5:00 and 5:15pm was told to call back a little while later. Hard to believe in this era of near-instantaneous online reservations where every traveler has become their own reservation agent.

At the end of that first summer, my enthusiasm for the job (and possibly my effort to push the ill-fated Detroit sleeper) was rewarded with a free round-trip first-class ticket to Montreal, enabling me to visit Expo '67 in person before the start of my sophomore year.

car was forwarded between Toronto and Montreal in the overnight Cavalier, which on the day of my journey (and apparently quite often) was operating in two sections, one all-coach, the other all-sleeper and each about 16 cars. Such was the volume at that time. Hotel space was tight in Montreal but one of the Chicago managers, Ron Ripple, made space available at low cost at an apartment-hotel his mother owned.

GTW's East Lansing depot was a no-frills affair, established as a stop at the suggestion of author McKinney to capitalize on MSU traffic. Kevin McKinney

As many long-time PTJ readers know (as do readers of Kevin Keefe's superb blog for Classic Trains), the following year I suggested to Mr. William Berrington, Grand Trunk's top passenger official, that a huge market was being missed by not making a stop in East Lansing, since it was difficult for students to get to the Lansing station. GTW management agreed and in the fall of 1968 opened a modest "station," a shelter with a small ticket office, and made me the commission agent. I marketed the service throughout the campus and in town, sold the tickets at the station and retained 10 percent of the gross sales. The station soon boarded more passengers than any location on the Grand Trunk, except for Chicago.

CONNECTION

Michigan State University students line up to board GTW's eastbound Maple Leaf at East Lansing in May 1969.

The westbound Maple Leaf arrives at GTW's East Lansing depot behind CN FP9A No. 6533 in May 1969.

Also helping sales was the popular new Mohawk, which in fall 1967 was transformed from an overnight train with a sleeper and head-end traffic (which had recently disappeared), to a fast afternoon schedule with club and dining service, a sharp contrast to the deteriorating New York Central/Penn Central service between Detroit and Chicago. The new Mohawk and the Toronto–Chicago Maple Leaf called at East Lansing on Fridays and Sundays. Since coaches were not reserved in the U.S., it was not clear initially how many passengers would show up for the big Sunday afternoon departure from Chicago. GTW solved that problem by spotting the base consist that contained an extra coach, with two additional coaches not coupled to the train or each other, behind. When the “base” train filled up, it was coupled to the next coach. When that filled up, the train coupled on to the remaining coach. After a while it became easier to estimate the demand, but I was certainly impressed with that innovative way to handle it initially.

City Ticket Office, which had been relocated to street level a block north at the corner of Monroe and Clark. It was felt that a more visible presence would lead to higher sales. I'm not sure if it achieved the desired result, but it was a nice facility. Business was still good, especially at East Lansing, but by that time railroads were discontinuing trains at an accelerating pace and as a result connecting business at Chicago was starting to fall off.

As graduation approached in spring 1970, I thought about a management career at Grand Trunk and inquired, but nothing was available. What was available was a position in Washington at the Federal Railroad Administration, working on the Railpax team that was intent on creating a new entity to run a revitalized national system of passenger trains. But that's a whole 'nother story.