

# The oldest flag finally falls

**T**HE NAME with the longest continuity in the U.S. transportation industry—Delaware & Hudson—ended after 177 years on December 1, 2000, when the Canadian Pacific Railway obtained authority to operate the D&H property under the CPR name.

The D&H was founded as the Delaware & Hudson Canal Co. in April 1823 to build a canal to transport coal from its mines in northeastern Pennsylvania to New York City. As the railroad industry evolved in the 1830's and '40's, it began marketing its coal by rail, finally selling the waterway in 1898 and dropping "canal" from its corporate title. Its big entry into the railroad business came in 1870, when it leased the Albany & Susquehanna, which ran between Binghamton and Albany. The following year, D&H leased the Rensselaer & Saratoga north of the Albany area, and by 1875 it had completed a railroad along the west side of Lake Champlain to Canada.

The D&H's glory period was in the early 20th century, peaking in the late '20's. During this time, it operated electric trolley and interurban lines around Albany and expanded its hotel and steamboat interests in the Lake George and Lake Champlain areas. D&H also had iron mines, apple orchards, and lime kilns in New York state, and it

developed and expanded coal mines in Pennsylvania. Great strides in steam-locomotive development occurred under legendary president Leonor F. Loree, who strengthened the company's financial foundations and greatly upgraded the infrastructure.

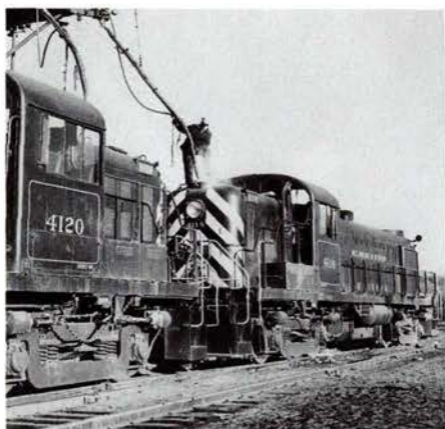
The late 1930's and World War II years saw a huge change in the way D&H trains were handled, from dragging heavy coal trains behind big 2-8-0's to moving merchandise consists behind swift 4-6-6-4 Challengers and dual-service, 75-inch drivered 4-8-4's. D&H's articulateds were handsome, with capped stacks, recessed headlights, shielded air pumps above a thin barred pilot, and a clean boiler devoid of pipes and accessories, a design that continued the English-style look of Loree's great fleet.

D&H's first diesel, an Alco S2 switcher, arrived in 1944 to operate on a wartime line extension from North Creek, N.Y., to a titanium mine in the Adirondacks where steam-engine sparks were a potential problem. Initially, D&H used diesels only for switching, but the first Alco RS2 road-switchers arrived in 1946, and by July 1953, 179 black Alco diesels (in models S2, S4, RS2, and RS3) had relegated all steam to scrap, inclu-

Three C628's lead train AB-4 at Mechanicville, N.Y. D&H was Alco's most faithful big customer.



By Jim Shaughnessy



ALL PHOTOS: JIM SHAUGHNESSY

"Basic black" (and yellow) RS3's get "sanded up."

ding five Challengers only 7 years old. The last steam holdout was on the north end, with 4-8-4 300 pulling train 8 south on July 21, 1953, from Rouses Point, where it had been kept as protection power for the *Montreal Limited*.

It was during this transition period that I began watching the D&H, mostly at Troy (N.Y.) Union Station, which served New York Central, Rutland, and Boston & Maine as well as the D&H.

The southbound *Laurentian* would come in behind a 4-6-2 or 4-8-4, each with distinctive "elephant ear" smoke lifters, and hand the train over to NYC for the trip to New York City. In summer, both the north- and southbound *Laurentians* came through Troy (in winter, the northbound went via Albany), and activity would intensify on the July 4th and Labor Day weekends when summer campers would travel to and from the Adirondacks. The *Laurentian* often ran in three sections. The regular train to Montreal would rate a big 4-8-4, the North Creek section two handsome 4-6-0's, and the Lake George section at least another 4-6-0. All this happened in a cramped station only one block long and six tracks wide.

My Uncle Con had worked for the D&H as a valve setter in the big Colonie (N.Y.) shop. He had a keen interest in railroads, and knew many people on the D&H, one of whom was engineer Herb Root. An enormous man, Root could barely fit into the tiny seat in the small cabs on the 600-class 4-6-2's, and he was senior enough to hold the *Laurentian* jobs. The D&H dining car was



switched out at Troy and taken back with the engine to Colonie, where both were serviced. Occasionally I would ride over with Herbie the 4 miles to the shop and my uncle would pick me up.

In 1951-52, I spent a year at Champlain College in Plattsburgh, N.Y., and my dorm room faced onto Lake Champlain with the D&H main line in the foreground. Most of the freights were still steam-powered, as were some passenger trains. The milk train, No. 18, was one of the last stands of the 600-class 4-6-2's. Southbound freights often set out and picked up at Plattsburgh just behind the college. The hotshot newsprint train, RW-6, ran at night and didn't stop, but as the big 4-8-4 that usually was assigned battled up the little grade after a slow order for a tight curve just south of the station, the windows of my room would rattle to the exhausts. I made several trips home on the Champlain Division locals in one of the old, but well-kept, wooden coaches with green plush seats. You could feel the surge of each piston stroke and hear creeks and groans from the wood structure of the car as the old Pacific accelerated away from each station stop.

The D&H was interesting in that the southern end, up as far as the B&M connection at Mechanicville, was double track, with grades and a good volume of traffic, but only one passenger train. The north end, on the other hand, was mostly a single track traversing

Last stand: An elephant-eared 4-6-2 leads southbound milk train No. 18 past Champlain College.

spectacular scenery, with 12 passenger trains and several branches. The cash traffic on the north end was newsprint from Canadian mills bound for newspapers in mid-Atlantic cities. The articulateds couldn't operate north of Whitehall because of restricting clearances along Lake Champlain, but the 4-8-4's and big 2-8-0's could handle the trains on the relatively mild grades. A Northern would easily deal with the 10 or 12 heavy Pullmans on the *Montreal Limited*.

Second-generation diesels showed up in 1960 in the form of Alco RS11's, and with them came the Champlain Blue and gray livery so widely associated with the D&H in its later years. The long domination of on-line Alco was broken in 1967 with GE U30C's, followed closely by three SD45's that had been EMD demonstrators. D&H's last new power would be 15 U23B's in 1969 and 20 EMD GP39-2's in 1976.

Probably the best recent years for the D&H were during the administration of Carl B. ("Bruce") Sterzing, who became president in 1972. He came from Norfolk & Western during the shuffle that occurred on northeastern railroads prior to the 1968 Penn Central merger.

A dedicated railroad man, as well as an enthusiast, Sterzing truly wanted the D&H to prosper. This was not easy in an atmosphere of declining traffic, ris-

ing costs, and the looming bankruptcy of many northeastern roads. He raised morale and used D&H's 150th anniversary to promote its image by holding a celebration ball for 900 employees and running a two-day, 22-car public steam excursion to Montreal. A display train with historical exhibits toured the system behind two of the impressive Alco PA diesels. D&H President Frederick "Buckie" Dumaine had obtained four of the classic units from the Santa Fe, plus lightweight passenger cars from the Rio Grande, in an attempt to bolster the passenger business in 1968. Sterzing's tenure also saw the PAs and ex-D&RGW cars on several public excursions, plus one behind the last two extant Baldwin RF16 Sharknose diesels, acquired from the Monongahela Railway in 1974.

The creators of Conrail in 1976 sought to preserve Eastern rail competition with a second carrier. This role fell



Two of D&H's four "renaissance" PAs lead the *Laurentian* at West Waterford, N.Y., in December 1970.

to the D&H, which expanded via track-age rights to Buffalo, N.Y., Harrisburg, Pa., Oak Island, N.J., and eventually Potomac Yard, Va. (it also added a line to Wilkes-Barre, Pa.). Suddenly more than doubled in size, the D&H needed more locomotives and cars, which it got

from two roads, Reading and Lehigh Valley, that were entering Conrail. All existing debt was retired with the aid of a \$28 million loan approved by the United States Railway Association.

The expanded operation lost money, but Sterzing hung tough until he resigned at the behest of the USRA in mid-1977. D&H continued under a succession of N&W-associated managers, who looked for ways to get rid of it. The PAs and Sharks were sidelined and sold. The six-axle freight units, including big Alco C628's, were withdrawn in favor of four-axle power. Some units that arrived during the expansion were repainted in blue and gray, but vestiges of LV and Reading colors contributed to over a dozen paint schemes in the fleet.

Beginning in the late '70's, Guilford Transportation Industries acquired the Maine Central and B&M and arranged with D&H to pool power on through

trains. Guilford bought the D&H in 1984, finally realizing the dream of a New England system that Dumaine and others before him had long proposed. Guilford strove to cut costs and revise labor practices, but tried to do too much too fast. Customers were lost. Unions struck twice. In June 1988 the courts ruled that Guilford had to pay all back wages and benefits lost during the strikes. This was a sizeable figure, so Guilford declared the D&H bankrupt.

It was sad to see a once proud and vibrant organization self-destruct. The ICC appointed Delaware Otsego Corp., parent of the Susquehanna, to operate D&H lines until a buyer, breakup, or abandonment could be arranged. Walter Rich, DO president and a rail enthusiast, rose to the occasion with the help of financial backer CSX and did a remarkable job in getting things moving.

Finally, after several plans were proposed, Canadian Pacific was authorized to buy the D&H for \$25 million on January 1, 1991. CP gave the property a needed infusion of investment, and retained the D&H corporate name in one of its subsidiaries—St. Lawrence & Hudson Railway—which operated CP lines in eastern Canada. The property has done well under CP, but even before the December 1, 2000, retirement of the D&H name, outward symbols like locomotives had mostly disappeared. Somehow, CP's "Northeastern U.S. Service Area" just doesn't sound the same. ■

## D&H fact file

(comparative figures are for 1929 and 1983)

**Route-miles:** 898; 1581

**Locomotives:** 445; 134

**Passenger cars:** 374; 0

**Freight cars:** 15,735; 4341

**Headquarters city:** Albany, N.Y.

**Special interest group:** Bridge Line Historical Society, P.O. Box 13324, Albany NY 12212; [www.bridge-line.org](http://www.bridge-line.org)

**Source:** *The Historical Guide to North American Railroads* (Kalmbach, 1999).