

The many faces of the New Haven

Main line and branch; fast long-distance passenger and commuter local; steam, diesel, and electric — NH had the ultimate in variety

*It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.*

JUST AS THE ELEPHANT in John Godfrey Saxe's parable was a different beast to each blind man, depending on which part he touched, the New York, New Haven & Hartford was a railroad of many different faces, depending on which part you saw.

The double-track Shore Line between New Haven and Boston was home to famous trains such as the *Merchants Limited* and *Yankee Clipper*, hauled by streamlined I-5 Hudsons or members of the largest fleet of Alco DL109 cab units, or the later Alco PAs and Fairbanks-Morse C-Liners. The four-track, electrified "West End" between New Haven and New York City was filled with intercity name trains and much suburban-zone M.U.-car activity. The New Haven shared Grand Central Terminal with the New York Central, but the intercity trains to and from

south of New York utilized Penn Station by way of the giant Hell Gate Bridge.

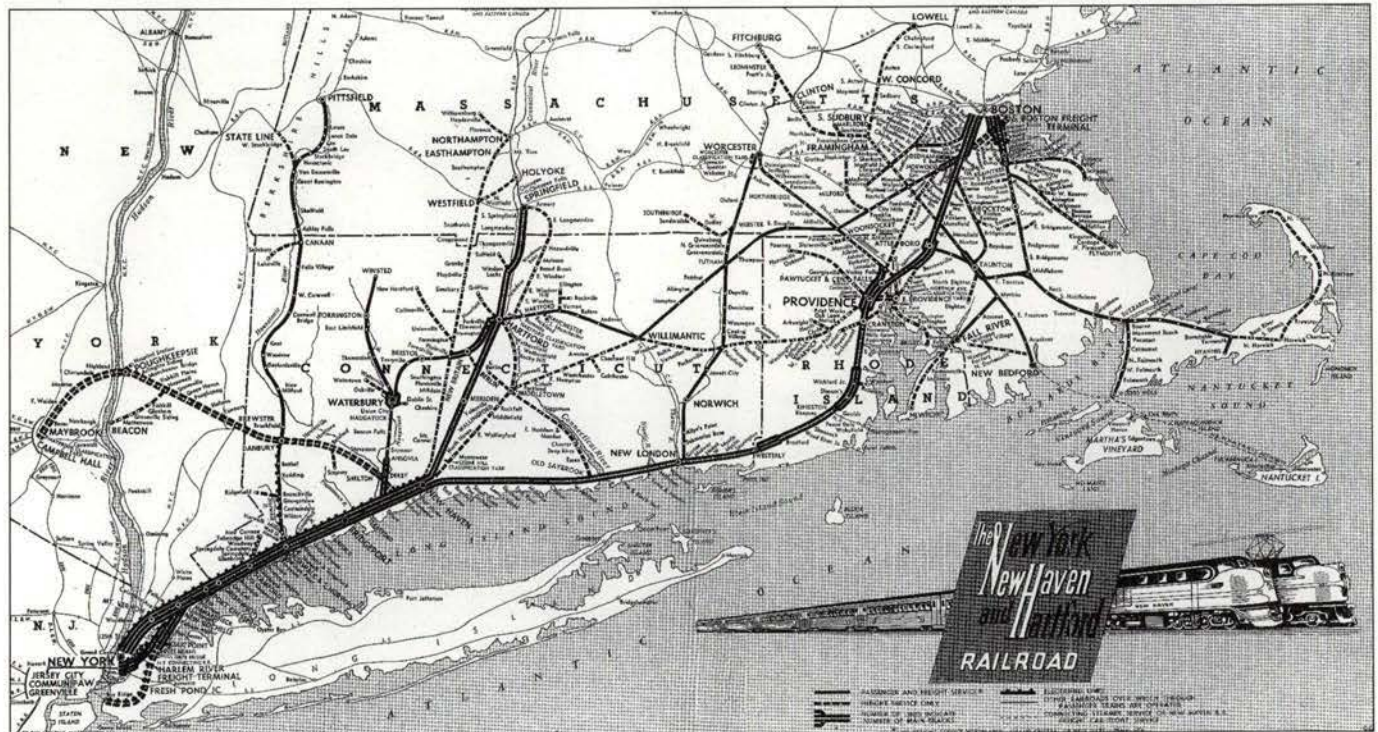
New Haven's freight artery across Connecticut and New York State to the Maybrook (N.Y.) gateway was heavy-duty "mountain" railroading, with beetle-browed L-1 2-10-2's pulling and pushing long drags across a sawtooth profile. They would be succeeded by matched sets of Alco FAs, and finally by almost any mix of freight power imaginable (including borrowed off-line units).

The great glass and steel trainshed at Boston's South Station saw the largest concentration of passenger traffic in the U.S. in the early 1900's, including the famous Fall River Boat Train which met palatial New Haven-owned steamships to and from New York for 90 years. New Haven's interurban-like early D.C. electric operations featured open cars and closed cars carrying the multitudes to Nantasket Beach, Mass., Providence, R.I., or New Britain, Conn. Further, New Haven men were at the helm of numerous steam and diesel tugs in New York Harbor, delivering carfloats to connections west of the Hudson River. Scenic country branch lines were another face of the New Haven, including

trains through the Berkshire Hills to Pittsfield, Mass., which boasted parlor cars into the 1960's.

The New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad was formed in 1872 by the merger of the Hartford & New Haven and the New York & New Haven; the fledgling NYNH&H owned just 85 locomotives and was surrounded by voracious competitors, both rail and water. Under the 1887-1899 reign of its most able president, Charles Peter Clark, the New Haven mushroomed in size and profitability by taking over railroads large and small. One was the fabled Old Colony, which secured the final Providence-Boston link of NH's Shore Line route from New York. Meanwhile its most dangerous threat, the partly parallel New York & New England, was vanquished and absorbed by 1898, giving the New Haven an almost-total rail monopoly in southern New England.

Thus at the dawn of the 20th century, the New Haven was a financial powerhouse, its stock the bluest of blue chips. From 1903 to 1913, however, the road was driven to near bankruptcy by several moves under President Charles S. Mellen and financier J. P. Morgan. One





J. W. SWANBERG

The original "McGinnis scheme," resuscitated today on Connecticut DOT units, is fresh on FL9's 2044 and 2002 as they leave New Haven for New York on May 22, 1962. In the engine servicing area are more FL9's and an Alco FA. A melodious Hancock air whistle is between 2044's windshields.

was the ill-advised purchase of almost every local trolley line in its territory. The New Haven also gained control of the Boston & Maine and Maine Central, backed construction of the hugely expensive New York, Westchester & Boston (a fiasco), and engaged in financial shenanigans which were investigated but never totally unraveled.

One real gain in this period, though, was control of the Central New England Railway, which included the huge Hudson River bridge at Poughkeepsie, N.Y., and the link to Maybrook and nearby Campbell Hall. This was New Haven's gateway to the west, also served by trunk lines Erie and New York, Ontario & Western, and bridge lines Lehigh & Hudson River and Lehigh & New England.

World War I government control and the Roaring '20's boom times saved the New Haven, but not enough to survive the Great Depression—bankruptcy ensued in 1935. World War II traffic allowed recovery and rebuilding, but soon all was lost once more by mismanagement, and bankruptcy followed again in 1961. The postwar New Haven was probably doomed in any case, because it faced not only ruinous highway and airline competition but also the almost total erosion of New England's heavy industrial base. Just a shell of the once-

mighty railroad was forced into a reluctant Penn Central on January 1, 1969.

Throughout its checkered history, the New Haven ran an incredible variety of equipment, both rail and non-rail. Its early steam power was mostly 4-4-0's for its heavy (and profitable) passenger traffic, but acquisition of so many other railroads resulted in a roster potpourri, from low-wheeled, Belpaire-boilered Hinkley 2-8-0's built for NY&NE drag freights to exotic double-ended Old Colony Mason "Bogie" 2-4-6T's that would have looked at home on the Denver, South Park & Pacific.

Until the Morgan-Mellen regime's slashing of maintenance expenditures resulted in shoddy power (and many wrecks), New Haven locomotives were customarily spit-shined, with gold leaf and polished brasswork, making them favorites of the few railfans of the time. Meanwhile, early Pacifics and high-driven Atlantics of 1907 were supplemented by heavier power, culminating in 50 I-4 class 4-6-2's of 1916. Ahead of their time in design, they pulled the road's best trains for over two decades until the Hudsons arrived. Freight steam power ranged from the conventional (USRA 0-8-0's and 4-8-2's) to the unusual (three-cylinder 4-8-2's with unsuccessful water-tube fireboxes).



THOMAS J. MCNAMARA

The New Haven's 1907 electrification from its New York Central connection at Woodlawn, N.Y., to Stamford, Conn., was a bold, even risky pioneering commitment to 11,000-volt A.C. catenary, which required the use of dual-voltage locomotives in order to operate on NYC's conventional 650-volt D.C. third rail from Woodlawn into Grand Central. Thus NH passenger electrics had to change at speed between the two systems, raising or lowering pantographs and third-rail shoes as required, a daunting technical challenge for the time.

Eventually 673 NH track-miles were under wire, including all electric-zone freight and switching. A succession of electric locomotive types culminated in the EP-5 rectifier passenger motors of

On the old Danbury & Norwalk, EP-2 motor 0325 leaves Wilton, Conn., on a 1954 summer Sunday with 139, the *Mahkeenac*, from Pittsfield, Mass.

1955. The 11,000-volt A.C. system was eventually adopted by other railroads, most notably the Pennsylvania for its Depression-era electrification between New York and Washington and west to Harrisburg, Pa. Even the legendary PRR GG1 was derived from the New Haven EP-3 box-cab 2-C+C-2's of 1931.

A diesel pioneer from its first Alco switcher of 1931 to its 1952 elimination of steam, the New Haven stayed with Alco right up through 10 Century 425's of 1964. NH also had diesels from Lima-Hamilton, Fairbanks-Morse, GE-Ingersoll-Rand, and General Electric, the latter ranging from early

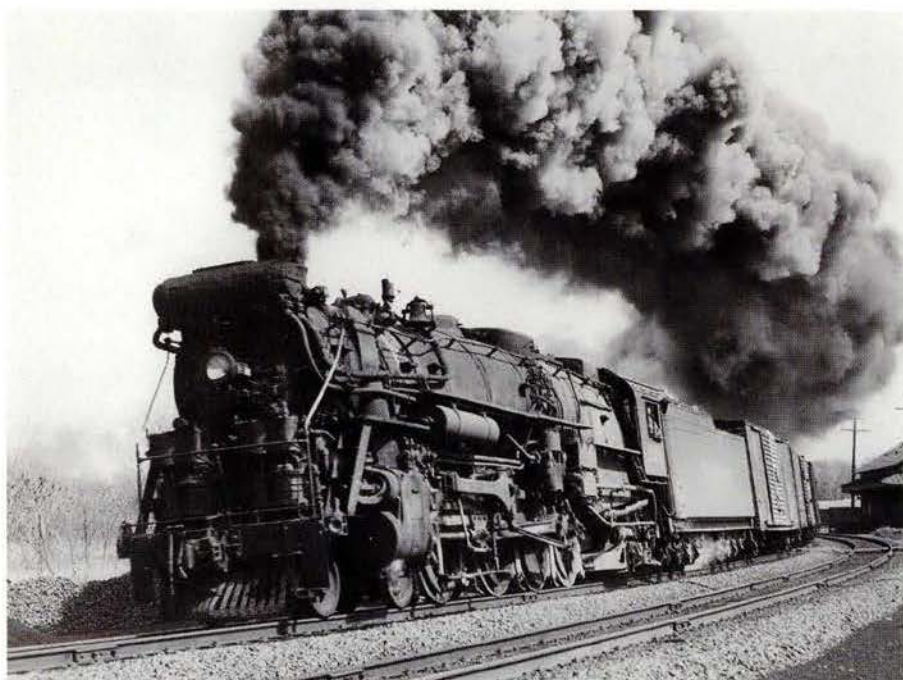
44-tonners to latter-day U-25B's. New Haven had no EMD's, though, until SW-1200's and GP9's of 1956.

Perhaps NH's most famous latter-day locomotives were its 60 dual-power (diesel- and third-rail-electric) FL9's, the last of which was EMD's final F unit, in 1960. Gas-electrics, Budd RDC's, and unsuccessful low-slung lightweight trains added variety. Innumerable paint schemes, including many versions of the flashy red-white-and-black of 1955 from controversial Presi-



CHARLES GUNN COLLECTION; COURTESY J. W. SWANBERG

Polished green-and-yellow FM C-Line 796 (a B-A1A-trucked CPA-24-5) and Alco PA 0784 exemplify NH maintenance in the early '50's.



ROBERT A. WITBECK; J. W. SWANBERG COLLECTION

dent Patrick B. McGinnis, assured that NH's locomotive fleet would never be all in the same livery.

My introduction to the New Haven was as a toddler before World War II; my father commuted to Manhattan from Darien, Conn. I was so enthralled by the big green electrics that I ran away from our Rowayton home at age 3 to check out the nearby four-track main line! Needless to say I got my hide well tanned for this, but it was too late—a New Haven fan had been born.

In 1948 our family moved to Newtown, Conn., near the Maybrook line, and I fell for the Alco FA's with their 100-car freights. Thus it was a dream come true when I was hired as a New Haven locomotive fireman in 1961. My parents loudly bemoaned sending me through college only to have me sink this low, but I loved working on those FA's and the numerous other diesel models. After a four-year stint in the Navy, I reluctantly left the New Haven in 1966 for a New York Central management trainee position. I was in supervision from then on, for NYC and successors, until retiring from MTA Metro-North Railroad in January 2000. Even my parents later agreed that my New Haven firing years gave me a

Seldom-photographed NH three-cylinder R-3-a 4-8-2 3562 storms through Warehouse Point, Conn., with symbol freight SN-5 in March 1947.

ground-level introduction to the industry which served me well.

Thinking back to my first railroad job in 1961, it was a lot easier to be the fireman on a bone-jarring Alco S1 switcher at midnight in Derby, Conn., if you loved the New Haven Railroad. I did, and I still do. ■

New Haven fact file

(comparative figures are for 1929 and 1967)

Route-miles: 2133; 1547

Locomotives: 957; 332

Passenger cars: 2110; 855

Freight cars: 25,082; 4200

Headquarters city: New Haven, Conn.

Special interest group: New Haven Railroad Historical & Technical Association, c/o Chris Adams, 362 High St., Milford, CT 06460; www.nhrta.org

Notable postwar passenger trains: *Colonial; Federal; Gilt Edge; Merchants Limited; Montrealer/Washingtonian; Patriot; Senator; Yankee Clipper*

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