AC&Y: First on the list, and innovative

How a onetime Akron, Ohio, terminal road grew to span much of the state, and prospered • **By Robert I. Warrick**

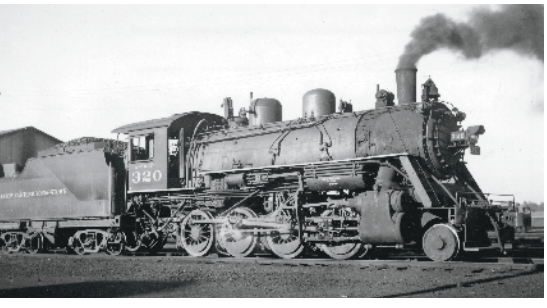
Late on a Sunday evening in February 1995, it was snowing hard and the thermometer read 10 degrees above zero when my phone rang. "You're called for the 565 Yard Job at 23:30 in Akron," said the crew caller for regional road Wheeling & Lake Erie. I made my way to Akron, Ohio, for my first night job as a trainman for the W&LE.

Arriving at Brittain Yard early enough to get my bearings and find the yard office, I had a few minutes to look around and think about where I was. A lone, black W&LE GP35 of Southern Railway heritage was on the service track in front of the multi-story brick office and enginehouse. A couple of tracks away, under the lights, was an Akron & Barberton Belt switcher. There was a 90-foot turntable and what looked like an old McKeen carbody serving as a storage building.

A generation and longer ago, this yard was the home of the Akron, Canton & Youngstown, the first Class 1 railroad alphabetically when there were more than 100 of them. AC&Y reached neither Canton nor Youngstown; rather, it stretched from Mogadore, 8 miles east of Akron, west 169 miles to Delphos, Ohio.

Being in Akron for the first time was a bit of an adventure for someone who started his rail career in Michigan. Akron, "the Rubber City," was the home of four big tire companies: Firestone, General Tire, Goodrich, and Goodyear. It was also the home of the Professional Bowlers Association and their Firestone Tournament of Champions at Riviera Lanes.

Train-watchers from the "classic era" might remember bright yellow AC&Y boxcars with the slogan, "Serving Ohio and the Nation." AC&Y's first diesel was a 1941 Alco S2, No. 101, but the road became more noted for its Fairbanks-Morse road-switchers. AC&Y once was known as being the most profitable railroad in the nation, and an innovator in an industry reputed for being anything but that. AC&Y hauled tires in stock cars, ran that secondhand McKeen in commuter service for Goodyear employees, tried hard rubber railroad wheels, and was an early road to embrace roller bearings (maker Timken was in nearby Canton).



Spiffy 1922 Baldwin 2-8-0 320, one of five that replaced 2-6-0s and among almost two dozen, poses at Delphos on July 31, 1948.
Paul W. Prescott

Two of Akron, Canton & Youngstown's 15 bought-new Fairbanks-Morse units, H20-44 502 and 208, its last H16-44, switch at Carey, Ohio, on July 28, 1963. Check out the 502's horns!
J. David Ingles

AC&Y was tied to Akron's history as much as it was to the city's rubber industry. In the early 1800s, Akron (a Greek word meaning "an elevation" or "point") was a booming industrial town at the summit of the Ohio & Erie Canal. When the canal connected Cleveland and Akron in 1827, it brought growth as farmers took their crops to Akron for milling or movement to the Lake Erie port at Cleveland. Milling, textiles and other industries soon followed, including pottery, cereal manufacturing, and toy-making.

Railroads followed and soon dominated Akron's transportation scene. By 1900, the Cleveland, Akron & Columbus (later part of the Pennsylvania), the Erie, the Pittsburgh & Western (later Baltimore & Ohio) and the Pittsburgh, Akron & Western ("AKW," later the Northern Ohio) all served Akron and helped put the seasonal canal out of business. Industry prospered, and Akron's population soared from under 80,000 in 1910 to over 200,000 in 1920—growth tied directly to the emerging rubber industry.

In 1907, only the Northern Ohio among Akron railroads was not in the Central Traffic Association, which set rail rates that most city business people felt were too high. Bringing in a new railroad would foster competition. Led by industrialists Zeb Davis, Harry B. Stewart, and Franklin A. ("F.A.") Seiberling, owner of Goodyear Tire & Rubber, they first eyed the Northern Ohio as a possible solution.

The road ran from Akron to Delphos and was an unwanted orphan. Built as a narrow-gauge and later standard-gauged, the poorly constructed pike did not have a strong traffic base other than the potential from rich limestone deposits at Carey, 107 miles west of Akron. Its only saving grace was that it connected with seven railroads, plus O. C. Barber's Akron & Barberton Belt just east of Akron.

Northern Ohio predecessor AKW in 1893 had worked to extend east from Akron into Pennsylvania. Under the name Akron & New Castle, a route was surveyed, right of way purchased, and trackwork begun from downtown Akron east

Mikado 405 leaves Medina June 10, 1953, with train 91. One of AC&Y's seven new Lima 2-8-2s, she was built in '41 as the second of two in class R-2. Classmate 406, built 1944, was the last standard-gauge Mike for a U.S. road. Siblings 400-401 (class R) came in 1926, 402-403 (R-1) in '28.

Willis McCaleb photo, courtesy Chris Lantz, AC&Y Historical Society

toward Mogadore and a connection with the original Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway, a 500-mile coal-hauler. "The Wheeling" stretched from Wheeling, W.Va., to Toledo, and from Cleveland to Zanesville, and had several branches. A&NC got only a mile and a quarter of railroad finished before the financial panic of 1893 stopped work and brought AKW to eventual bankruptcy and reorganization. Northern Ohio operated the finished portion as the Akron Transfer Railway. Reviving the Akron & New Castle idea, the promoters organized the Akron, Canton & Youngstown Railway in 1907 and bought control of the A&NC. Construction restarted in 1911 at the east end of the Akron Transfer, and by 1912, 7½ miles were completed to Mogadore.

The rubber and the railroad

From the start, business began to boom as Goodyear began routing all its inbound coal over the line. Several new industries quickly located on-line in Akron, including two new Goodyear plants. AC&Y connected with every railroad in Akron, and even with the 1917 takeover of the railroads by the USRA during World War I, business grew as the rubber industry thrived during the conflict.

AC&Y's owners had grander ideas, and a glimpse into their aggressive nature was seen not long after the line was completed. Through a wholly owned subsidiary, East Akron Land Co., property was acquired along the line near Mogadore where the AC&Y planned a big new industrial park. Much like the first such U.S. park, the Central Manufacturing District in Chicago (owned by the Chicago Junction Railway), the Mogadore facility was promoted by AC&Y for having an available labor pool and competitive rail rates and service. By the 1920s the Akron park was the largest in the region and contributed substantially to AC&Y's bottom line.

Changes in management also came early. Zeb Davis sold his interest to Harry Stewart, whose family ran the railroad throughout its history, and to F.A. and Charles W. Seiberling of Goodyear. By 1919 Goodyear had controlling interest.

AC&Y's first locomotives were five new Lima 0-6-0s acquired in 1912. Two new Alco 0-8-0s were added in 1920, right after USRA restrictions were ended, as traffic continued to grow.

Not forgetting the potential of Northern Ohio's connections to the west and the friendly outlet for Akron traffic they would bring, AC&Y moved to take control, leasing the N.O. in 1920 and beginning to modernize its physical plant.

Bridges had to be replaced, and light iron rail was replaced with heavier steel rail. Suddenly, the little terminal road with Class 1 revenue was a long-haul pike with connections to nine other roads: A&BB, B&O, C&O, DT&I, Erie, Nickel Plate, NYC, Pennsy, and W&LE. ('The


FM diesels may have been ubiquitous on AC&Y road trains, but its Alco switchers were diverse. Clockwise from top left: RS1 102 at Akron July 6, 1963; ex-Delray Connecting S2 103 at Akron in August 1962; boxcar 3308 in fall 1963; and ex-Nickel Plate S2 104, also at Akron July 6, 1963.

Four photos, J. David Ingles

Wheeling would go into NKP in 1949.)

A notable connection was at Columbus Grove, where AC&Y crossed Henry Ford's Detroit, Toledo & Ironton ["Fallen Flags Remembered," Summer 2010 CT]. Ford and F.A. Seiberling were not just business acquaintances, they were also good friends. Ford was a regular guest at Stan Hywet Hall, the Seiberling mansion on Akron's west side. Soon after AC&Y leased the Northern Ohio, Goodyear began routing all the tires for Ford's auto plants via DT&I.

The Northern Ohio lease included 10 Brooks 2-6-0s and 12 Alco 4-6-0s. The Moguls went to scrap early, replaced by 5 new Baldwin 2-8-0s in 1922-23 once the light bridges were rebuilt. Two new Lima 0-8-0s came in 1926 and four new Lima 2-8-0s in 1926-28. Seven more second-hand Alco 2-8-0s followed in 1928-29, plus a Baldwin 0-6-0 in '29, as traffic kept increasing. Another Baldwin 0-6-0 was acquired in 1939.

AC&Y's road workhorses were seven bought-new 2-8-2s, all built by Lima (from 1926 to 1944), plus four purchased from the Nickel Plate (three Alcos, one Lima) during 1945-47, which became Nos. 407–410. These four followed a five-month lease of NKP 602 during 1944-45; all were from Nickel Plate's H-6 class.

After S2 No. 101, war restrictions had forced the road to acquire another steam locomotive, its last, Lima 2-8-2 406, in 1944. That same year the Akron, Canton & Youngstown Railway merged with the Northern Ohio Railway to create the Akron, Canton & Youngstown Railroad.

Unlike on many small roads, the steam-to-diesel transition did not happen overnight on AC&Y, as management wanted to get every serviceable mile out of each steam engine before retirement.

In 1945, AC&Y bought a new Alco RS1 diesel and an Alco 2-8-2 from Nickel Plate, followed by the additional NKP 2-8-2s. In June 1949, AC&Y got its first road diesel, FM H15-44 road-switcher 200. Apparently AC&Y liked that FM, because the road returned to the Beloit builder big-time, getting four 2,000 h.p. end-cab H20-44's, 500–503, in 1948, one more in '51, and another in 1954. Three H16-44's, successor model to the H15, came in 1951, three more in 1954, another in 1955, and its eighth and final one in 1957. Purchasing the H16-44's allowed AC&Y to retire its last steam locomotives, Mikados 402–406, during 1954-55.

Through the 1960's, AC&Y bought six used Alco S2's for switching because FM had ceased domestic locomotive production in 1958; their heritages were Delray Connecting, Nickel Plate, and N&W. The DC unit came in blue, and AC&Y repainted some FM's from yellow to blue. AC&Y also wound up with three former Pittsburgh & West Virginia FM H20's via Norfolk & Western after the 1964 merger.

Postwar prosperity

AC&Y's traffic was heavy, profitable, and increasing from the 1940s through the 1950s. Solid limestone trains moved east from Carey to Akron and Medina. Other on-line business flourished, and the Akron rubber traffic boomed. Passenger traffic was negligible, and the last scheduled train quietly left the timetable in 1951.

The lucrative overhead or bridge traffic was also growing, accounting for nearly one-third of AC&Y's carloads. With rail rates set by traffic bureaus, the rate for a commodity such as steel was the same from any point to any point, regardless of the route. Railroads shared in the revenue through divisions also set by the bureaus. AC&Y traffic salesmen worked all over the country, convincing industry traffic departments to route their shipments via AC&Y. Steel from

Switching at Carey on Washington's Birthday in 1964 are H20-44 504, repainted from yellow into blue, and H16-44 204. The following October, AC&Y would join Norfolk & Western's family.
Norm Herbert

Pittsburgh would come off the Nickel Plate at Spencer and be handed off to the DT&I at Columbus Grove for forwarding to Detroit, for example.

In the early 1960s, though, the railroad scene was changing. AC&Y traffic was booming, but the growing trend of rail mergers threatened its highly profitable overhead traffic. Traffic from the Akron rubber companies was also threatened. Costs were going up and revenue was shrinking as truckers took more and more of the high-revenue traffic away from all railroads. AC&Y managers took a look into the future, and they were perhaps aware that Akron's tire industry was in decline, as new tire plants were opening in southern states.

Getting out while the getting is good is a wise business move, and AC&Y management approached the Norfolk & Western about getting involved with its merger plans. The deal was made, and in October 1964 N&W took over the AC&Y as part of the merger of the Nickel Plate and P&WV and the lease of the Wabash. AC&Y continued to operate as a separate company with N&W management until 1982, when it was fully absorbed into the new Norfolk Southern. (Meantime, N&W gradually reassigned or sold the FM diesels, with N&W Geeps taking over on the AC&Y.) Also in 1982, General Tire, the last tire manufacturer in Akron, shut down its truck tire plant, ending an era of tire-making that dated from the 1920s.

The westerly 55 miles of the AC&Y, from Carey to Delphos, were abandoned in 1992 and later removed. So too, were the big tire plants in Akron abandoned and demolished.

The balance of the AC&Y was kept in place owing to the heavy local traffic on its east end, including a substantial amount from the limestone quarries at Carey. When NS divested itself of the old Wheeling & Lake Erie in 1990, the new regional of the same name purchased the remaining AC&Y physical plant.

The new "Wheeling" was just getting itself organized and focused under new management in early 1995 when I walked into the old AC&Y Brittain yard office. The Wheeling had a long row to hoe back then to make itself into what it is today, one of the most successful U.S. regionals. Back then, I too had a long row that needed attention. That night, however, I was just glad to be back on the railroad and to have survived the night!

AC&Y fact file

(comparative figures are for 1929 and 1964)
Route-Miles: 171; 171
Locomotives: 25; 18
Passenger cars: 5; 0
Freight cars: 223; 1,674
Headquarters city: Akron, Ohio
Special interest group: Akron Canton & Youngstown Railroad Historical Society, P.O. Box 196, Sharon Center, OH 44274; www.acyhs.org
Recommended reading: *Twilight Rails, the Final Era of Railroad Building in the Midwest*, by H. Roger Grant (University of Minnesota Press, 2010)
Source: *Historical Guide to North American Railroads* (Kalmbach, 2000)