



**NORTH SHORE  
LINE**  
INSULL'S INTERURBAN LEGACY: 1

# Last Days of the NORTH SHORE

BY JOHN GRUBER/PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

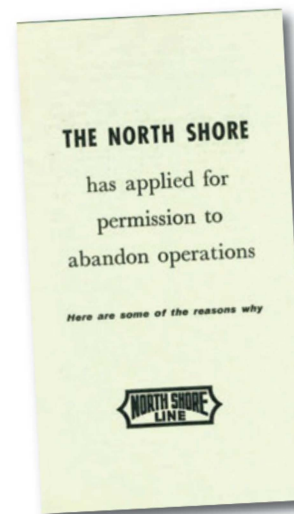
WHEN I STARTED MAKING PHOTOGRAPHS of the North Shore Line in 1960, I simply wanted to preserve on film the last days of the historic electric interurban railway, known for its dependable every-hour-on-the-hour trains on its 88.9-miles of track between Chicago and Milwaukee and frequent local service to Mundelein. Both the railroad and my photography of it ended 50 years ago in January 1963. Now, another tradition has come to an end — the 50th and final employee reunion on November 4, 2012.

Photographing the North Shore was an interesting and unusual experience — my first to document railroaders at work. It was not until years later that I learned about the company's remarkable accomplishments in Illinois and Wisconsin in speed, streamlining, advertising, poster making, and station design, among others. My new knowledge inspired me to delve into the history of the company and to preserve

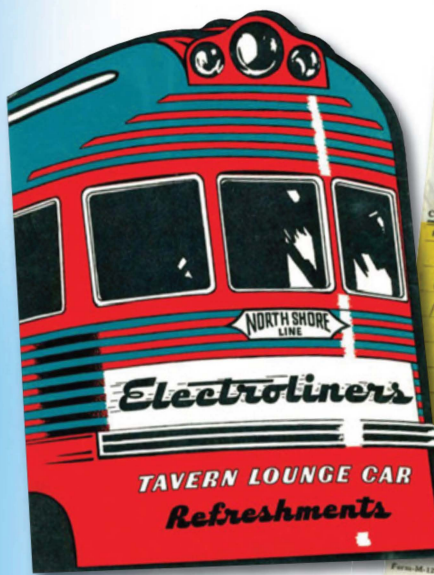
more of its record in print and on the Internet.

I never got acquainted with the original Shore Line, which opened from Waukegan to Evanston in 1899. The Shore Line served a string of communities close to Lake Michigan, running on city streets in downtown areas. This congested line was abandoned in 1955. The original route was extended north from Waukegan to Milwaukee in 1908, and the newer Skokie Valley bypass route opened in 1926. This line, well maintained for high speeds and frequent service, brought much recognition to the company (and many places for photography for me).

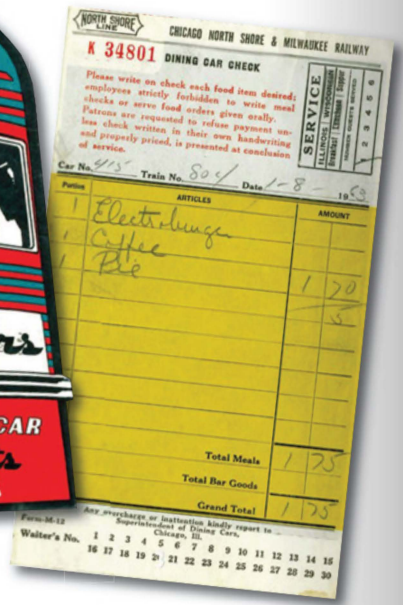
My first and last trips were with the Illini Railroad Club. I sold my 32-page North Shore booklet (future RAILFAN & RAILROAD editor Jim Boyd told me he admired the photography) on the last day of operation. In between I roamed the property freely, observing employees and passengers going about their



OPPOSITE: In 1963, an Electroliner negotiates the curve from Harrison St. to Wabash St. just south of the Chicago Loop. ABOVE: This brochure was distributed to customers in 1958 outlining the reasons why North Shore was seeking to end all operations. COLLECTION J.J. SEDELMAYER



In 1963, a lunch consisting of an Electroburger, pie, and coffee would have set you back \$1.75. COLLECTION J.J. SEDELMAIER



daily activities. I followed the cars along the streets of Milwaukee, watched the sailors jam the platforms at North Chicago Junction on their way for a weekend away from the naval base, and rode the trackage on the elevated into Chicago. The trains were getting shorter, but there were no cutbacks in schedules or maintenance.

What I did not know about were the grand traditions and accomplishments, especially beginning in 1916 when Samuel Insull purchased the bankrupt Chicago & Milwaukee Electric Railway and renamed it the Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee (no commas required). Learning and writing about these has opened my eyes to a host of groundbreaking North Shore endeavors, sometimes far ahead of those of the steam roads that operated in the same Chicago-Milwaukee corridor. Here are some examples beginning before the Insull era.

In 1904 the A. C. Frost Company created Ravinia as an amusement park to bring riders to the Chicago & Milwaukee railroad headed by Frost. The park evolved into what is now the oldest outdoor music festival in North America, one that presents world-class music every summer.

Insull management invested heavily in track and equipment improvements while initiating the use of innovative advertising and art-quality posters. First published in 1921 in cooperation with other Insull railways and utilities,

these posters represent the best advertising campaign of the 20th century that focused on a single urban area in the U.S. They show an unprecedented commitment to a regional outlook far in advance of their times. The poster artwork of Oscar Rabe Hanson and others frequently appeared in exhibitions of advertising art held by the New York Art Directors Club, and remain prized collector's items today.

The line won the first Charles A. Coffin gold medal in 1923 "for distinguished contribution to the development of electric transportation for the convenience of the public and the benefit of the industry." General Electric established the award in honor of the retirement of Coffin, one of its founders.

The 23-mile, high-speed bypass route through the Skokie Valley opened in 1926 to the west of the shore line, and in 1927 the North Shore won *Electric Traction* magazine's speed trophy. The railway went on to win the trophy five times in nine years, and took permanent possession of it in 1933. Donald M. Steffie listed the *Chicago Limited's* 15.4 mile, 13-minute run at 71.1 m.p.h. from Deerpath to Skokie in his annual speed survey until the end of North Shore service.

On the closing day of the 28th International Eucharistic Congress of the Catholic Church on June 24, 1926, at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary at Mundelein, the North Shore delivered a loaded train every 40 seconds for

A collection of colorful North Shore timetables and tickets. A 1937 edition (BELOW) boasts the North Shore's speed records, while the final 1962 issue (RIGHT) was a bit more reserved. COLLECTION J.J. SEDELMAIER



BELOW: The North Shore's street running portion in Milwaukee was a stark contrast to its high-speed Skokie Valley Route.



**Yesterday on the North Shore Line**  
Map illustration by Otto M. Vondrak ©2013 Carstens Publications, Inc. Not an official map. Not all routes and stations shown.

Innovation continued when two streamlined "Electroliners" entered service in 1941, with styling in part by Chicago architect James Eppenstein. The tavern-lounge car offered food and beverage service, featuring a tasty "Electroburger" served until the very end. The new trains regularly traveled the 15 miles between Kenosha and Waukegan in 13 minutes. Norman Madsen, a motorman, remembers getting the Liners up to 90 m.p.h. They were geared for 85 m.p.h., but "if you know how to 'pop' the controller at the break at substations, when your trolley goes over it, you cut it off and snap it back on. There was 600 volts but you could get [the full] 700 volts on it." The high speed was achieved going down hill, north of Racine.

I regret that at the time I completely missed the opportunities for oral interviews — or may be even a full oral history or two. But I did not know the workers names, except for one, until later.



**RIGHT:** While setting out interchange for the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern, freight motorman Dan Kennedy looks ahead as his brakeman keeps an eye on the trolley pole at Rondout, Illinois. **BELOW:** A "Silverliner" makes the transition from Fifth to Sixth Street in Milwaukee.



These whimsical animals were part of the interior styling of the Electroliners, produced by the design firm James F. Eppenstein Associates, and were used on promotional materials as well. COLLECTION OF J.J. SEDELMAIER



**TOP:** Motorman Julian Tanney blows the whistle and works the air brakes on a Mundelein to Lake Bluff local train. **ABOVE:** An Electroliner picks up speed on the railroad's private right of way on the south side of Milwaukee. **LEFT:** Lounge attendant Leslie Johnson, Jr., gets a little help on the final day of service from off-duty motorman Don DeVuysem (in background). Despite the circumstances, there were friendly, talkative crowds on the last runs.

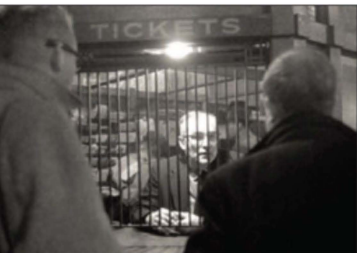
At the time, I photographed Julian Tanney as a motorman on the Mundelein local from North Chicago Junction to Mundelein, not knowing who he was until a friend of his asked for his picture. He died only a few months after the North Shore itself ended. I did not know about a complaint he made to the Lake County board of supervisors (the line served many Lake County communities) and others about proposed competing Greyhound bus service, reported in the *Chicago Tribune* on April 17, 1960. Another, and unrealized, downside was the Susquehanna Corporation's (North Shore's holding company) board of directors was dominated by Greyhound Bus and Milwaukee Road officials.

The first cutbacks in service came in 1955, when the North Shore successfully campaigned to shut down the money-losing Shore Line route. It seemed that the rest of the system might continue, but in 1958 the North Shore announced its intention to abandon all passenger service. After years of hearings, protests, and delays, the Interstate Commerce Commission approved the North Shore's petition in late 1962.

January 20, 1963, would be the last full day, and I rode on regular trains seeing all the lines, and (since there was no rail service) rode a bus to visit the offices and shops at Highwood. On the last *Electroliner* (Train 809, Electroliner 802-801) into Milwaukee, I met ticket collector John Horachek in the tavern-lounge car, working with motorman Bill Keller and conductor Earl Hansen. In true North Shore tradition, it arrived on time at 9:52 p.m. Waiter Leslie Johnson, Jr., concluded his service with the others that night. The lounge was crowded and Orin Schmidt, Electroliner foreman, and motorman Don DeVuysem (who had already made his last run) helped. It was a friendly, talkative crowd, but there was sadness in the background. Horachek rode 502 miles, paid and unpaid, riding the trains on the last day and into the morning hours.

The Milwaukee Terminal at Sixth and Michigan was crowded, providing wonderful opportunities for "last-night" photographs. Soon after midnight, the last train left Milwaukee. It crossed the Sixth Street viaduct on its way to Chicago, arriving for the final time at Roosevelt Road on the Chicago "L" in the wee hours of the morning on January 21. After final flash bulb exposures of the final crew, it was all over.

Years later, Horachek helped identify people in the photographs I had made in 1960-'63 and invited me to the reunions. Beginning as a company employee picnic in 1898, they have long outlasted the railroad itself. The re-



TOP: The North Shore terminal at Sixth and Michigan in Milwaukee was crowded as passengers waited for the last train on January 20, 1963. ABOVE: Francis D. Passer was the ticket agent at Milwaukee. RIGHT: Inside the terminal lone Peters and Ruth Teas served up smiles and refreshments at the lunch counter for what would be the last time. Note the Electroliner design etched into the mirror.

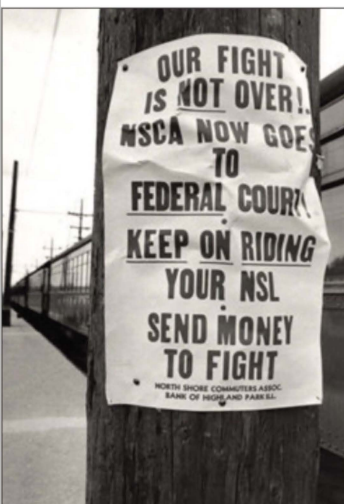
union committee (David and Julie Myers, Don and Maxine Kennedy, Betty Oleson, Tom Jervan, and Horachek) have planned recent events. Some employees attended all the reunions; for Myra Ehnert, who worked in the office at Highwood, Illinois, in 1952-'55, her first was 2012. "A very good day for me, full of good memories," she said. She recalled helping out a soldier who got off the train at Highwood, headed for Fort

Sheridan across the street. As she was having lunch on the porch, he asked her: "Here's my girlfriend's number, please call to let her know I arrived okay." She made the call.

A formal dinner and a picnic in Waukegan for 500-600 people, including employee families, started off the reunion events in summer 1963. About 100-150 turned out for a dinner in evening dress just before the first an-

iversary of the railroad's shutting down. Two picnics were held away from Waukegan: in 1973 at the East Troy museum and the next year at the Illinois Railway Museum. Since 1974, a less formal dinner has been held at Waukegan. Attendance dropped, but a consensus developed to continue the event through its 50th anniversary. In 1996, 90 employees attended; there were 18 for 2012. Although railfans

The author was able to put names to faces thanks to friendships maintained over the years with former North Shore employees. TOP LEFT: Motorman Howard Odinius looks back for hand signals at North Chicago Junction. TOP RIGHT: Conductor Howard R. Renner welcomed passengers aboard for the final time at North Chicago Junction. ABOVE LEFT: Collector John Horachek speaks with Maury Klebolt of Illini Railroad Club on the last Electroliner run to Milwaukee. ABOVE RIGHT: Switchman Steve Homzacak working at Edison Court, in Waukegan. LEFT: This poster's rallying cry of "Our Fight is Not Over!" rang hollow after the final trains rolled to a stop on January 21, 1963.



have been invited, the committee felt the reunion belongs to employees and should not turn into a railfan event, so it decided the 50th would be the last.

The reunion committee also keeps track of company history. It compiled an inclusive list of 9,723 employees (the railroad averaged 675 during its last year of operation). About 59 are living, mostly in their 80s or 90s, and many find it difficult to get out or travel.

The North Shore photographs I made 50 years ago have become a cherished preservation venture. But the amazing story is of the railroad family spirit that has kept the North Shore memory, history, and pride alive for half a century after the line itself called it quits. ■

John Gruber is founder and director of the Center for Railroad Photography & Art, based in Madison, Wis.