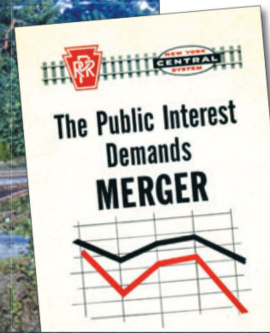




LEFT: Symbolizing the new merger image, New York Central, Pennsylvania Railroad, and Penn Central units team up to lead a freight through Rotterdam, N.Y., in September 1968. The red "P" was a short-lived variation to the modern PC logo only applied in the spring of 1968. KEVIN EUDALY COLLECTION

BELOW: Years of negotiations, hearings, and propaganda resulted in approval of the Penn Central merger to take effect on February 1, 1968. There was no hiding the tension between the two leaders as NYC President Alfred E. Perlman and PRR Chairman Stuart T. Saunders shake hands for the cameras. POSTER EMILY MOSER COLLECTION, PHOTO GARY FARMER COLLECTION



PENN CENTRAL

FIFTY YEARS LATER

JERRY W. JORDAK/PHOTOS AS NOTED

WORKING AGAINST THE FORCES of gravity, an iron ore train powered by a half-dozen six-axle diesel locomotives grinds its way up the east slope of the Allegheny Mountains out of Altoona, Pa. Meanwhile, a trio of EMD GP40s speeds along the shore of Lake Erie with a train of new automobiles from Detroit heading to dealer showrooms in New England. Over in Indiana, an elderly geep picks its way along an overgrown branchline with bad track on a train with more crew members (five) than freight cars (three). And in New Jersey, passengers on a station platform take a few steps

backward as a shiny, tubular aluminum passenger train streaks by on an express track at an amazing 150 m.p.h.

What do all of these vignettes have in common? They were everyday scenes on the modern mega-railroad everyone loves to hate — Penn Central.

An Unlikely Marriage

Railroads in the 1960s were facing unrelenting competition from trucks, airlines, and Interstate highways. The Interstate Commerce Commission, created in 1887 primarily to regulate the railroads, was slow to permit rate increases and often rejected railroads'

requests to abandon low-density, unprofitable branchlines. Employers began to move their manufacturing operations from the northeast to the south as a cost-saving measure, eroding the traffic base of the eastern railroads. Meanwhile, the Post Office was diverting the shipping and handling of mail away from railroads to air and truck transport, which doomed passenger trains.

To combat all of this, some lines looked to mergers as a way to reduce costs and stay in business. The modern railroad merger movement began with Norfolk & Western buying the Virginian in 1959. This was followed by the Erie and the

Lackawanna joining forces in 1960; the Chesapeake & Ohio acquiring control of the Baltimore & Ohio in 1963; the N&W (again) acquiring control of the Nickel Plate and leasing the Wabash in 1964; and Atlantic Coast Line merging with Seaboard Air Line in 1967.

The unlikely merger of the Pennsylvania and the New York Central was more than a decade in the making. The two railroads first began discussing a possible merger in 1957, but the talks never went anywhere and broke off in January 1959. Shortly after, the Central attempted to join the C&O-B&O merger, but was rebuffed.

By the end of 1961, as the other railroads in the east began making their plans to pair off, PRR and NYC saw themselves among the last on the dance floor and resumed talks in earnest. The following year, the boards of directors from both railroads gave their approval to the proposed merger. The ICC approved the merger in April 1966, but

opposition by other railroads and the Department of Justice delayed the actual merger date until February 1, 1968.

A Rough Start

In a brief ceremony held just after midnight at 30th Street Station in Philadelphia, a car foreman walked up Track 1 to a business car marked "CENTRAL" and peeled off a sheet revealing the word "FENN" to a small group of gathered press and railroad officials. The simplicity of the event did not reflect the turmoil behind the scenes. To wit, former New York Central President Alfred E. Perlman elected to remain inside his private car during the unveiling, while former Pennay head Stuart T. Saunders was nowhere to be found. It was an inauspicious start.

The new company hoped to integrate the two railroads immediately and quickly realize some of the merger's expected cost-savings. Instead, Penn Central was in operational chaos almost

from the start. Part of this was due to the incompatible PRR and NYC computer systems that could not talk to each other to exchange information about freight cars and shipments. While there was some advance planning between the two railroads, the plans were either outdated by merger day or there was no time to implement changes because of the delay in merger approval. Some changes were never implemented due to lack of funds.

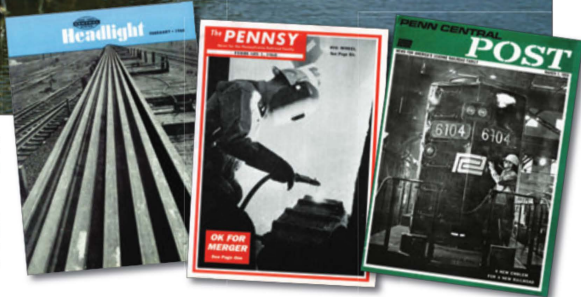
Penn Central's attempts to consolidate interchange to one location in areas that were served by both NYC and PRR were often thwarted by connecting carriers. Traffic was often misrouted to the wrong location as the other lines were slow to update routing instructions, causing significant delays and "lost" cars.

One of the many concessions agreed to was the inclusion of the bankrupt New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad. The New Haven had grown through the 19th and early 20th centuries by buying up most of its competition, dominating



ABOVE: Bound for Selkirk Yard, Penn Central 6331 leads Train NE-2 at Iona Island, N.Y., in September 1970. New York Central single-tracked the former West Shore Railroad in the 1960s. ROBERT MALINOSKI PHOTO, TODD NOVAK COLLECTION

RIGHT: The *Central Headlight* made brief mention of the merger approval inside its final edition, while *Penny* teased the news on its last cover. The first issue of the *PC Post* was dated March 1, 1968, calling itself "News for America's Leading Railroad Family." OTTO M. VONDRÁK COLLECTION



rail transportation in southern New England. In the postwar era, its traffic was eroded by the collapse of the manufacturing base, and the large number of duplicate routes and branchlines it operated which became a huge drain on its meager resources.

In addition, the New Haven was burdened by a large money-losing passenger operation, including intercity and commuter trains between New York and New Haven, Springfield, and Boston. As losses piled up, maintenance was deferred. All of this left the New Haven with heavy debt, too many route miles, little freight traffic, and worn-out infrastructure. The result was bankruptcy in 1961. With no potential for turning the New Haven into a profitable enterprise again, its bankruptcy trustees successfully petitioned the ICC for inclusion into the PRR-NYC merger.

Disagreement between Penn Central and the New Haven over the value of the railroad assets delayed the actual takeover of the New Haven until January 1, 1969. Adding the burden of the New Haven may not have been the straw to

break the proverbial camel's back, but it certainly did not help Penn Central's already precarious financial situation.

Bankruptcy

While the Penn Central was having its operational struggles, the company's executive suite was just as dysfunctional, starting with its two top men — Stuart Saunders and Alfred Perlman.

Saunders had a background in law and had served as president of the PRR-controlled Norfolk & Western from 1958 to 1963, where he engineered its merger with the Virginian and laid the groundwork for the N&W's acquisition of the Wabash and Nickel Plate. He was named president of the PRR in 1964, and his primary task was to ensure the PC merger was brought to fruition. This included negotiating with labor unions over job protection and utilizing his political connections in Washington, D.C., to convince labor unions and various departments of the federal government, along with the Supreme Court, that allowing the two railroads to merge would be in the best interest of the public.

Perlman, Saunders' counterpart at the New York Central, climbed the ranks at both Burlington and Rio Grande in their engineering departments, then was hired as president of the New York Central in 1954 by its chairman Robert R. Young who had successfully won a proxy fight for control of the railroad. Perlman worked to cut costs, reduce debt, and modernize the railroad, but was unable to avoid having to seek a merger partner for survival.

On merger day, Saunders became chairman of Penn Central while Perlman became the railroad's president, reporting to Saunders. However, they hardly saw each other since Saunders worked out of PC's headquarters in Philadelphia and Perlman preferred to work out of the former NYC offices in New York City. They did not work well together nor did they trust each other. Such "Red Team/Green Team" fighting between former PRR and NYC managers trickled its way down through the ranks as time went on.

In his push to get the merger approved at any cost, Saunders agreed to contracts with the labor unions that provided



NYLB - New York & Long Branch was a joint operation shared with the Central Railroad of New Jersey.

On the surface, Penn Central put forth the image of a healthy transportation franchise with new locomotives, fresh paint, and flashy high-speed passenger trains.



LEFT: A Metroliner train speeds through Elizabeth, N.J. The high-speed rail program was a partnership between the Pennsylvania Railroad and the federal government. The first Metroliner trains entered service in 1969. KEVIN EUDALY COLLECTION

BELOW LEFT: Fresh jade green paint brightens up a Peoria & Eastern boxcar. The P&E was a former NYC subsidiary that operated between Peoria, Ill., and Indianapolis, Ind. KEVIN EUDALY COLLECTION

BELOW: Penn Central GP30 3164 was built new in September 1968, and represented some of the first new diesels to arrive on the property following the merger, seen here at Toledo, Ohio, in August 1970. DICK VARTABEDIAN PHOTO, KEVIN EUDALY COLLECTION



for lifetime protection for any worker whose position would be eliminated by the merger. Consequently, Penn Central was unable to significantly reduce its labor force and was hampered in its effort to eliminate duplicate facilities and their respective employees.

As operations continued to melt down, customers who had the option began routing their traffic to other railroads. The decline in revenue, coupled with the higher operational costs, were the exact opposite of what, on paper, the merger was supposed to bring. Meanwhile, the





ABOVE: The Hudson Line was still an important artery for freight traffic as well as a busy commuter corridor, as evidenced by the layover yard full of electric m.u. cars at Croton, N.Y., on December 2, 1973. Train VN-4 has just made a set-out and is resuming its journey toward New York City. GEORGE HAMLIN PHOTO

RIGHT: Worn electric m.u. cars in new and old paint layover in the West Yard at Wilmington, Del., on June 21, 1969. At its peak, Penn Central operated 35 percent of the nation's passenger trains, and nearly two-thirds of the service in the East. ROGER PUTA PHOTO, MEL FINZER COLLECTION



company continued a PRR practice of investing in nonrail assets like pipelines, real estate, amusement parks, and an airline, diverting much-needed funds away from the railroad.

On December 1, 1969, Perlman was replaced as president with Paul Gorman, who had retired the month before as president of Western Electric. Perlman assumed the role of vice chairman, a meaningless position that removed him from day-to-day control of the railroad. Meanwhile, the debt continued to mount on PC's balance sheet. Penn Central managed to successfully hide its financial situation from shareholders and creditors for the first couple of years, even paying out dividends in 1968 and 1969 despite losing millions of dollars.

Winter 1970 was particularly bad for

Penn Central, and not just because of the weather. Inflation, coupled with a retroactive wage increase, added to the railroad's ongoing problems and resulted in an operating loss of over a million dollars a day for the first quarter of 1970. There was also \$200 million in debt that was coming due by year's end. The railroad could no longer hide the truth from its shareholders, the banks, or the public.

Financial institutions started to dump their Penn Central holdings while the railroad started seeking financial

assistance from the federal government to stay afloat. The banks refused any further loans without a change in management. At a meeting of Penn Central's board of directors on June 8, 1970, Saunders, Perlman, and Chairman of the Finance Committee David Bevan were relieved of their duties, and Paul Gorman assumed the role of chairman. However, the change in management did not delay the inevitable. After a last-ditch attempt to secure a government-guaranteed loan failed, Penn



ABOVE: Less than three months after New Haven's inclusion into Penn Central, equipment was already being reassigned. A pair of former New Haven dual-mode EMD FL9s lead a mix of ex-New York Central heavyweight and lightweight coaches on a Grand Central-bound commuter train as it roars through Mott Haven Junction in the Bronx in March 1969. DAN POPE COLLECTION, COURTESY MIKE ROBBINS



LEFT: The United Aircraft TurboTrain was an attempt to bring high-speed service to the New York-Boston corridor. A westbound train ducks under Interstate 95 as it approaches Bridgeport, Conn., in 1970. The federally funded highway paralleled the former New Haven line, allowing trucks to siphon away freight traffic while the modern lightweight train was no match for decades of deferred track maintenance. MIKE SCHAFER PHOTO

Central filed for bankruptcy protection under Section 77 of the Bankruptcy Act on June 21, 1970.

Passenger Service

One of Penn Central's many problems was its extensive passenger services, which lost millions of dollars per year for the struggling railroad. Before the merger, both PRR and NYC had cut back their intercity routes as much as the ICC would allow. The Central had even introduced "Empire Service" featuring short, frequent trains in the New York-Albany-Buffalo corridor as a way to reduce costs. At the time of the merger, PC was operating trains from New York to

Chicago, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and St. Louis, along with trains between Cleveland and Cincinnati; Cleveland and Indianapolis; Philadelphia and Pittsburgh; Baltimore and Harrisburg; Chicago and Louisville; Chicago and Detroit; Albany and Boston; Buffalo and Harrisburg; and two sets of trains between Chicago and Cincinnati. There was also extensive intercity and commuter service on the PRR's electrified corridor between New York, Philadelphia, and Washington. The inclusion of the New Haven added New York-Boston, New Haven-Springfield, Mass., and New York-Pittsfield, Mass., routes.

The railroad tried to stem its losses

from intercity passenger service by consolidating and downsizing stations and discontinuing what routes it could, though many attempts to eliminate trains were rejected by the ICC, including Penn Central's attempt in March 1970 to get rid of all trains west of Buffalo and Harrisburg. At this time, politicians in Washington, D.C., were already working on how to remove the passenger train burden from the freight railroads. PC's subsequent bankruptcy added a sense of urgency, culminating in the passage of the Rail Passenger Service Act in October 1970. This legislation led to the creation of Amtrak, which ultimately relieved Penn Central (and most of the rest of the nation's railroads) of its intercity passenger trains on May 1, 1971.

Besides the long-distance services,



ABOVE: It looks like Penn Central, but we are one year into the Conrail era. A couple of ex-PC GP38s lead a freight cross the old Monon and Erie Lackawanna lines at Hohman Junction, Ind., in April 1977. LOU GERARD PHOTO

RIGHT: Bright green cabooses provided a relief from the somber black diesels of the Penn Central era. PC 19180 is a former PRR class N-5 cabin car, originally built between 1914 and 1917 among some of the first all-steel cars. LOU GERARD PHOTO



Penn Central was responsible for operating hundreds of commuter trains each weekday in metropolitan areas across its system. The largest concentration of PC commuter service was New York City, with trains coming into the city from all directions over all three predecessor railroads. Philadelphia, home of Penn Central's headquarters, also had extensive electrified commuter operations. The New Haven added in its commuter service serving the Boston area. Smaller commuter operations included Ann Arbor-Detroit, Baltimore-Washington, and the Chicago-Valparaiso, Ind., "Valpo Dummy." There was even an international run operated in cooperation with the Toronto, Hamilton & Buffalo between its namesake cities.

While these trains were vital to the commuters who relied on them to get to work every day, they were just another financial burden to the cash-strapped Penn Central, which spent as little money as possible to maintain the equipment or improve service. Countless horror stories abounded over the years as trains would run late, be annulled, break down, derail, and in a few cases,

even catch fire. This was despite the involvement of local government agencies that provided subsidies, equipment, and in some cases purchased or leased the commuter lines and contracted their operation back to Penn Central.

One bright spot in Penn Central's passenger service was the Metroliner. This extra-fare, high-speed train service on the former PRR electrified corridor between New York and Washington had its origins with the passage of the High-Speed Ground Transportation Act in 1965 that established a partnership between the U.S. Department of Commerce and the PRR to design, build, and operate high-speed trains. While PRR was trying to get out of the passenger rail business at the time, Stuart Saunders saw the Metroliner project as a way to help obtain government favor

for his proposed merger with the NYC.

The first revenue service trip ran on January 16, 1969. The trains soon became wildly popular with the public and ridership grew. The Metroliner program proved that improved equipment, fast schedules, aggressive marketing, and a focus on customer service could beat out the airlines in similar markets, and also encourage passenger travel systemwide. The success of Metroliner helped pave the way for the creation of Amtrak.

Freight Service

Despite being bankrupt for most of its existence, Penn Central was vital to the transportation system of the Northeast U.S. It served every major industry in the northeast — steel mills in Youngstown, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and northeast

Indiana; auto manufacturing in Detroit; coal mines in Pennsylvania and southern Indiana; agricultural customers such as grain elevators and feed mills in the western half of the system; and scores of others. It also served as a connection for shipping fruits and vegetables to East Coast markets.

Both merger partners were heavily into the piggyback trailer business, with the PRR's "TrucTrain" service and NYC's "Super-Van" services. While PRR carried almost exclusively truck trailers, NYC primarily hauled Flexi-Vans, a predecessor to the modern intermodal shipping container. Penn Central introduced the "TrailVan" brand for its intermodal services in late 1968. Seeking to cut costs, the pioneering Flexi-Vans were phased out in favor of traditional

trailer- and container-on-flatcar service.

Several modern hump yards across Penn Central's system helped classify its freight traffic. Hump yards built by the New York Central before the merger included Elkhart and Avon (near Indianapolis), Ind., and Syracuse, N.Y., while Pennsylvania hump yards included Conway (near Pittsburgh) and Enola (near Harrisburg). Construction on Alfred E. Perlman Yard in Selkirk, N.Y., began in 1966 under New York Central and was completed in 1968 under Penn Central. Finally, PC built a hump yard of its own about ten miles west of Columbus, Ohio. Construction on Buckeye Yard began in 1968 and was completed in 1970. This yard allowed PC to eliminate several smaller yards around Columbus and take some of the burden off Avon

Yard by classifying eastbound traffic and letting Avon focus on classifying westbound traffic for western connections at St. Louis.

Motive Power

Compared to its competition, Penn Central's motive power was not the most colorful. The dark paint schemes of the PRR and NYC continued under Penn Central, but with modern lettering and a futuristic logo that, to this day, is still referred to as "worms in love." Attempts to add some color to the monochrome PC image with red Ps or orange Cs were short-lived. After the bankruptcy, new president William Moore decreed that predecessor logos still found on locomotives should be immediately painted out and replaced with a PC logo. With money for repainting motive power in short supply, many locomotives would keep this interim "paint-out" image until Conrail.

What Penn Central lacked in paint, however, it made up for in variety. Penn Central rostered almost 4,100 locomotives at the merger, which included diesel models from EMD, General Electric, Alco, Baldwin, Lima-Hamilton, and



LEFT: The former New York Central Collinwood Yard outside of Cleveland remained a busy hub for Penn Central into the 1970s. Today, Cleveland roughly marks the division between Norfolk Southern and CSX portions of the former Conrail system. JAMES SEMON PHOTO

BELOW: With thousands of former Penn Central locomotives to repair and repaint, many units were hastily patched "CR" and pressed back into service in the early Conrail era. HAROLD ZIEHR PHOTO, KEVIN EUDALY COLLECTION



Fairbanks-Morse. PC's roster included some relatively rare locomotive models such as the Alco T6, RS27, RS32, and Century 430, and the Baldwin DRS4-4-1000. For a couple of years, it even operated a high-hood Alco HH660 switcher inherited from the New Haven.

In addition, all three PC predecessors contributed electric locomotives to the PC roster. From the Pennsylvania came the famous GG1 and the brawny E44 freight motor, along with six B1 electric switchers and a 1910-built DD1 used in wire train service. New York Central's electric locomotives were all used in its electrified passenger service territory out of Grand Central Terminal. These included 14 T-motors and 14 S-motors, along with 21 ex-Cleveland Union Terminal

P2a and P2b motors used on the Hudson Line south of Croton-Harmon. Upon its inclusion into Penn Central, New Haven contributed 11 ex-Virginian E33 freight motors and eight E40 passenger electrics, along with its 60 unique dual-mode FL9 cab units that could operate under both diesel and third rail electric power.

Penn Central's Legacy

The bankruptcy of the Penn Central was the largest in history at that time. While since eclipsed by far larger corporate failures such as Enron (2001) or Lehman Brothers (2008), Penn Central's bankruptcy brought similar surprise, shock, and anger and led to the destabilization of the rail network in the Northeast. Bankruptcy protection relieved it

from having to make payments to other railroads, such as for joint-use facilities charges and per diem car fees, yet other railroads were still required to make similar payments to Penn Central. Coupled with the decline of the region's industrial base and the devastating effects of Hurricane Agnes in 1972, one by one the remaining solvent railroads of the Northeast joined PC in bankruptcy. Lehigh Valley was controlled by PC and declared bankruptcy a month after its parent in 1970. Reading followed in 1971, Erie Lackawanna and Lehigh & Hudson River in 1972.

Government leaders in Washington realized that they could not let the rail network grind to a halt and began working on a way to save it. Congress

RIGHT: After deregulation, Conrail was free to abandon thousands of miles of excess track and duplicate routes. A scrap train harvests rail at Brookville, Ohio, in 1983. BRAD MCCLELLAND PHOTO

BELOW: Small "PRR" logos began to appear on former Conrail locomotives that were transferred to Norfolk Southern after the 1999 split. JERRY W. JORDAK PHOTO

BOTTOM: Twenty-three years later, the Penn Central merger was undone when substantial portions of the former NYC and PRR lines were split between CSX and Norfolk Southern. JERRY W. JORDAK PHOTO



ABOVE: Members of the Penn Central Railroad Historical Society toured historic Buffalo Central Terminal during their 2016 Annual Convention. JERRY W. JORDAK PHOTO

LEFT: Norfolk Southern's Penn Central heritage locomotive SD70ACe 1073 takes a spin on the turntable at the North Carolina Transportation Museum on July 4, 2012. JERRY W. JORDAK PHOTO

passed, and President Richard Nixon signed the Regional Rail Reorganization Act of 1973, which created the United States Railway Association to develop a plan to build a new consolidated railroad system from the profitable pieces of the bankrupt carriers. The result was the Consolidated Rail Corporation, better known as Conrail, which began operations on April 1, 1976.

The first few years of Conrail seemed like a more colorful version of Penn Central. Since PC owned more locomotives than all the other predecessor roads combined, the early Conrail locomotive numbering scheme more or less followed PC practice. Headquarters were established in the former PC offices in Philadelphia. Many PC executives and managers continued on into Conrail. More worrisome to many, Conrail continued Penn Central's streak of annual losses through 1980, despite millions in government investment in repair and recovery.

What helped Conrail turn the corner to profitability was the passage of the Staggers Act in 1980. This legislation deregulated the industry by allowing railroads to set rates that would recover capital and operating costs and adjust rates as the market demanded. It also allowed railroads to abandon unprofitable or duplicate routes. Under the leadership of L. Stanley Crane, Conrail abandoned or sold off thousands of miles of track. The following year, Congress passed the Northeast Rail Act of 1981, which allowed Conrail to exit the commuter passenger business and turn over these operations to local transit operators such as Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, New Jersey Transit, and Metro-North.

With these two acts of Congress, Conrail was given the tools to succeed

that Penn Central never had. Even if PC had avoided its post-merger operational problems, without shedding the dual albatrosses of excess track and passenger service, the Penn Central story very likely would have ended with the same result.

Back to the Future

Meanwhile, the Penn Central Corporation continued to exist, since Conrail had merely purchased the railroad assets it wanted to operate as dictated by the USRA's "Final System Plan." The company continued to sell off its remaining real estate, settle any lingering litigation, and eventually focused its efforts on its insurance business. Shedding the old railroad image once and for all, the company changed its name to American Premier Underwriters in 1994, and today is a part of Cincinnati-based American Financial Group.

A final irony to the Penn Central story came with the breakup of Conrail in 1999, as CSX Transportation acquired most of the former New York Central and Norfolk Southern took over most of the former lines of the Pennsylvania Railroad. This "un-merger" of the Penn Central was reflected in the two limited liability companies created to manage the transition: Pennsylvania Lines LLC for NS and New York Central Lines LLC for CSX. Conrail freight cars that would be transferred to CSX were relettered with "NYC" reporting marks, while locomotives that would become NS property were renumbered and sub-lettered "PRR." In the end, Al Perlman finally got his merger with the B&O and the C&O, while the Pennsy joined up with its old N&W and Wabash assets.

In the years following the Conrail breakup, it seemed that Penn Central went from being a railroad that was universally scorned to one that was

"interesting" and "cool" to many people. Perhaps it was due to the motive power variety of PC's time that is long-gone today, or the mainlines and branches through cities and towns that lost them under Conrail, or maybe a new generation of railfans saw Penn Central as an unique period in time, on the border between classic and modern railroading. Model railroad manufacturers, that for the most part would not market anything lettered "Penn Central" for fear of a lack of sales, now produce a multitude of high-quality cars and locomotives in several scales for the PC modeler.

Railfans also began to take interest in remembering Penn Central through equipment preservation. Today, there are several museums around the country with preserved or restored PC rolling stock. There's even a Penn Central Railroad Historical Society, a group I'm proud to say I helped organize in 1999, and that is still going strong today.

Probably the greatest acknowledgment came when it was announced that Penn Central would be one of the railroads represented in its fleet of heritage locomotives painted for Norfolk Southern's 30th anniversary. On June 25, 2012, NS SD70ACe 1073 rolled out of the Progress Rail plant in Muncie, Ind., in dark green paint and white Penn Central lettering, a sight that most people would have considered impossible in the 21st century.

Perhaps it is true — at least in the case of Penn Central — that time really does heal all wounds. ■

Jerry W. Jordak grew up along the Baltimore & Ohio Lake Branch but still somehow ended up a Penn Central fan. He lives in Macedonia, Ohio, next to a former PC line (now Norfolk Southern), and also models PC in HO scale.



ABOVE: No. 1073 leads Norfolk Southern "bare table" Train 23R through New Waterford, Ohio, on June 20, 2016. DEREK DAY PHOTO

The Picturesque PENN CENTRAL

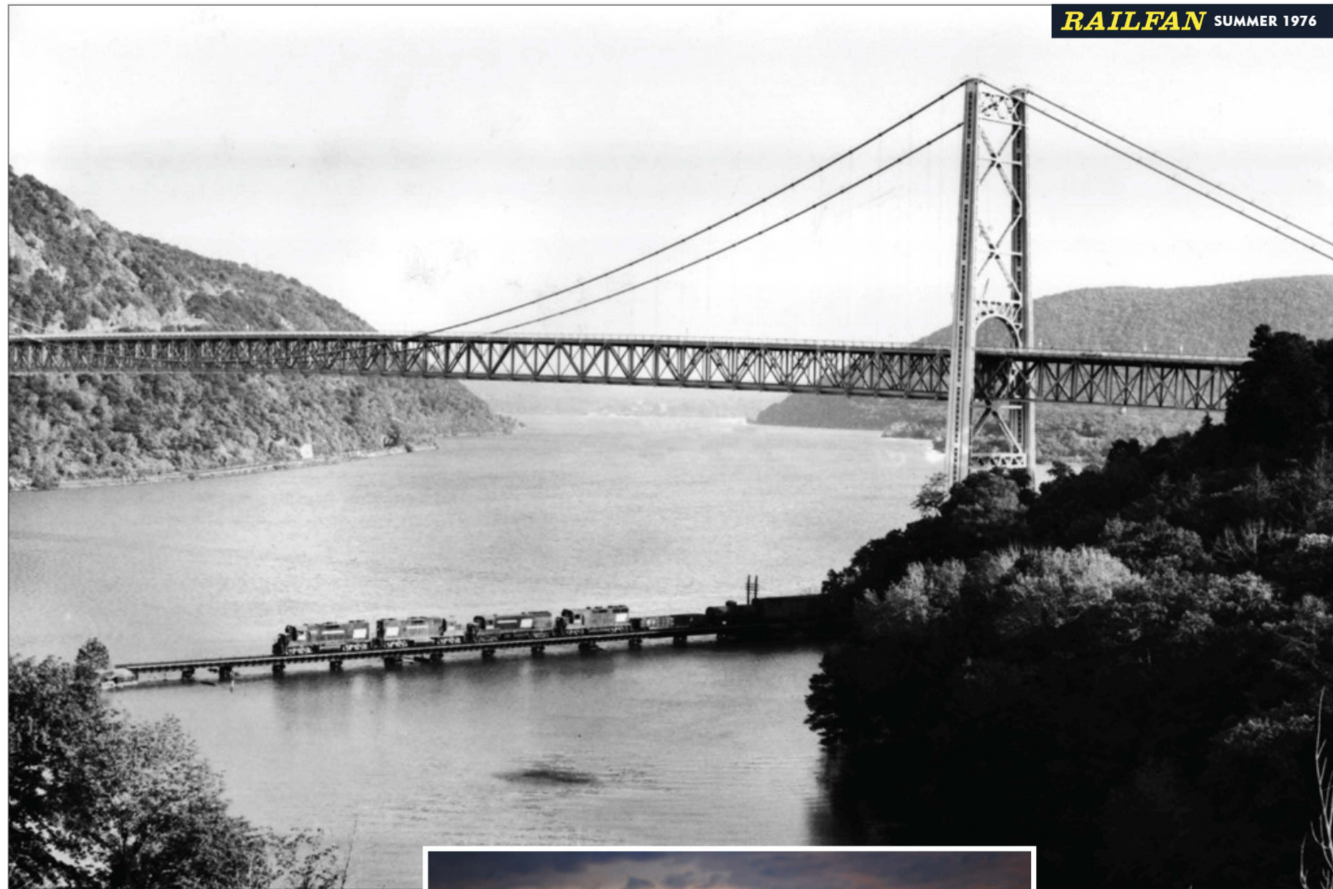
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE that the Penn Central is now history. One wonders what future generations of railfans will think of when the topic of the Penn Central is brought up; surely bankruptcy, the Red Team vs. Green Team struggles, bad track, and that hopelessly uninspiring black paint come to mind. That's a pity, too, because even with its bad press and negative public image, the Penn Central had a lot to recommend it. Any railroad that could claim the heritage of the lordly New York Central and the awesome Pennsylvania must have had a lot to work with...

When Jim Boyd penned his introduction to "The Picturesque Penn Central" in the Summer 1976 issue of RAILFAN, no one knew for sure what the future would

hold for the railroads of the Northeast. Penn Central had become a symbol for failure as it dragged down the entire railroad network into a colossal crisis that threatened to cripple an already weak national economy. Reactions in the railfan community were mixed. Some turned their backs on PC completely, saving their valuable Kodachrome for colorful railroads with brighter futures. Of course, those who kept the faith simply ignored the somber black paint and instead continued to journey trackside to capture their favorite scenes.

Conrail came on the scene in 1976 and covered the Northeast in a sea of blue. Paying tribute to the failure of Penn Central was the furthest thing from anyone's mind at the time.

Norfolk Southern's Heritage Locomotive program was initiated in 2012 to help celebrate the 30th anniversary of the union of Norfolk & Western with Southern Railway. Included in that heritage were the colorful components of Conrail, which NS acquired part of in 1999. Rumors swirled through the spring of 2012 as to which railroads would be commemorated. Some were surprised when SD70ACe No. 1073 emerged from the Progress Rail plant in Muncie, Ind., in fresh Penn Central paint. Once again, the railfan community was divided. I doubt Boyd could ever fathom such a tribute to the much-maligned PC. Love it or hate it, Penn Central is a part of our colorful railroading history, and it's here to stay. —OTTO M. VONDRAK



ABOVE: The mighty Hudson River is responsible for some of the best scenery along the old New York Central lines. A northbound freight on the old West Shore route passes over the Bear Mountain Bridge, crossing the trestle over Popolopen Creek in 1968. The city of Peekskill, N.Y., can be seen in the hazy distance under the bridge. JIM BOYD PHOTO, KEVIN EUDALY COLLECTION

LEFT: Norfolk Southern's Penn Central heritage unit rounds a curve west of Henrietta, Mo., at sunrise on March 24, 2017. The locomotive is leading Train 239 on a joint trackage segment NS shares with the BNSF Marcelline Subdivision east of the Kansas City area. This former Santa Fe line commonly hosted engines from PC, and later, Conrail on run-through freights. ZACH PUMPHREY PHOTO



ABOVE: Led by a former New York Central EMD E8, nameless Train 427 passes the iconic mill and dam along the Quaboag River in West Warren, Mass., on a warm evening in June 1968. Through passenger service on the old Boston & Albany line was limited to a pair of round-trips at the time of the Penn Central merger. JIM SHAUGHNESSY PHOTO

RIGHT: Norfolk Southern's Chicago Line from Cleveland to Chicago features a few New York Central-era signals dotting the mainline. Two of the most notable were the bracket signals just outside Swanton, Ohio. On April 8, 2017, Train 21G thunders west with a loaded double-stack container train. Sadly, these pieces of history were taken down after new signals were activated a few months later. CARLOS FERRAN PHOTO



TOP: Penn Central heritage ventured into New York Central's eastern territory on May 4, 2014, leading CSX Train K-011 through the junction at Solvay, N.Y., just outside of Syracuse. These empty oil tanks originated from the Port of Albany. AMANDA OAKES PHOTO

ABOVE: Norfolk Southern showcased its Heritage Locomotives in grand fashion on July 2, 2012, at the North Carolina Transportation Museum at Spencer, N.C. Locomotives were thoughtfully grouped by "family," including this lineup of Pennsylvania, New York Central, and Penn Central tributes outside the Bob Julian Roundhouse. OTTO M. VONDRAK PHOTO



LEFT: On July 28, 2013, NS Train 65R awaits a crew to become BNSF U-NSDELU0-69T and continue west at Western Avenue. The iconic Chicago skyline featuring the Sears/Willis Tower provides a backdrop. DON KALKMAN PHOTO



TOP: On June 29, 2013, Norfolk Southern Train 64R passes the shuttered Alto Tower in Altoona, Pa., on its way eastbound to Reybold's Delaware City refinery with a long train of crude oil tanks. Penn Central and Illinois Terminal heritage units team up on this day. DUSTIN FAUST PHOTO

ABOVE: Beauty is where you find it, and a quartet of classic Pennsy MP54 m.u.s driving through a May thunderstorm at Princeton Junction, N.J., on a westbound Trenton Local could easily qualify. HENRY POSNER III PHOTO



LEFT: Traditional Pennsylvania Railroad-style position light signals guide Norfolk Southern Train 64J on August 23, 2012, through Leetsdale, Pa. The unit trash train is bound for Oak Island, N.J. HARRY GAYDOSZ PHOTO

BELOW: The Pennsy electrification saw much more than just urban scenery, especially on the lines in the Susquehanna River valley at Safe Harbor, Pa. A pair of ex-Virginian rectifiers pass trestlework that is reminiscent of the climb out of Elmore as they head north on the Columbia & Port Deposit line. Overhead is the Atglen & Susquehanna freight main from Harrisburg to points east. TOM KLECIC PHOTO

