

# The Peanut Line

by Lynne Belluscio

Last week we had a request for information about the date of the first train which came through LeRoy on the "Peanut Line." This line was originally known as the Canandaigua and Niagara Falls Railroad.

John Sheret has written a couple of articles in the Crooked Lake Review and he writes that, "The Peanut Line had its genesis at a meeting, held in Lima, NY, on March 4, 1851, relative to the construction of a six-foot gauge railroad from Canandaigua to Niagara Falls, a distance of ninety-eight and one-half miles. The first Board of Directors consisted of six men from New York City in addition to Isaac Seymour of Peekskill; the noted surveyor, Augustus S. Porter of Niagara Falls; Benjamin Pringle of Batavia; Samuel Rand of Mendon; Francis Paul of Canandaigua; George Wright of East Bloomfield; and Ira Godfrey

of Lima. The estimated cost of construction was two million five hundred thousand dollars."

The *LeRoy Gazette* had a small article about the first train which came through LeRoy on January 1, 1853: "The first train through from Canandaigua passed through LeRoy on Saturday at about 12 o'clock but one passenger car accompanied by the locomotive and tender on this experimental trip. A large number of our citizens were at the depot space (The station hadn't been built yet.) to welcome this very welcomed pioneer Messenger and did so with hearty cheers which were responded to by those on board. On the return trip the amateur travelers came from Stafford, five miles in twelve minutes- making excellent time considering the rapidity with which the line has been brought into use. Much of the work is

only temporary – the bridge across the creek in this village, entirely so. The work of graveling and leveling up we presume will proceed with all dispatch . . ."

The Historical Society has a diary of a farmer in Stafford who writes about the early railroad. On June 1, 1852 he wrote: "Good deal talk about rail road south of here." And on January 1, 1853 he saw the first train: "Canandaigua Railroad go west at 2 o'clock for the first time." R.A. Murphy remembered the trains on the Canandaigua line: "We had the old six-foot gauge on the Canandaigua & Niagara Falls Railway. They had engines called the Niagara, Sam Brown, Ben Pringle, Elmira and others, all inside connected engines. ... I remember two brothers, Mike and Pat Dwyer, who ran engines on this old road. I often rode down to LeRoy with them."

It seems that regular traffic on the railroad was delayed until the turntable in Batavia could be completed. But eventually the trains ran regularly. But apparently the company went bankrupt and in 1858, the Canandaigua Niagara Falls Railroad was acquired by the New York Central and became known as the Batavia Branch. The six-foot gauge tracks were converted to the standard four-foot eight inch width. Dean Richmond of Batavia, who was President of the New York Central, was asked about the Canandaigua and Niagara Branch Line, and replied that it was "only a little peanut line" and the name stuck.

The Peanut Line crossed the Oatka Creek in the Village of LeRoy on a bridge north of the Erie bridge. According to the 1888 Railroad Journal, the New York Central built an iron bridge across the Oatka in LeRoy in the spring. Neither the iron bridge of the NY Central or the Erie bridge remain today. The bridge that crosses the Oatka today, is the old Buffalo, Pittsburgh and Rochester Railroad bridge. As far as I know, there are no photographs of the railroad bridges, but I am still looking.

The Peanut line, west of LeRoy, is known for a spectacular train accident on February 7, 1885. In



**Cut in the curb on the west side of Lake Street where the Peanut line of the NY Central crossed the road.**

the midst of a raging snow storm, three west-bound engines pulling two baggage cars attempted to bust through the snow drifts, headed to Batavia. Not knowing if they would be successful, the railroad men had dropped off the passengers in LeRoy to fend for themselves. The locomotives lost their battle with the snow, and sent a hearty soul, on foot off to Batavia, to get help. A massive snowplow headed east to rescue the stranded train. Luckily the stranded crew had gotten off the engines and were waiting out their rescue away from the track because what ensued would have meant death.

The information that was given the engineer of the snow plow was wrong. The stranded train was at the Batavia city line, not the town line, and instead of slowing down to meet the stranded train, the plow was going at full throttle when it met the stranded train head on. The trains remained in this spectacular position for a while, and became a photo opportunity. P. B. Hausenkecht's photograph became legend. (It has been used to illustrate many other similar accidents, at different locations!)

Gradually sections of the Peanut line were abandoned through Bloomfield, Holcomb, Caledonia, Ionia, Stafford, LeRoy, Getzville, Amherst, and Batavia, and like other railroad history, it will soon be forgotten.

On July 21, 1946, a special excursion left Buffalo's Central Station in Tonawanda and traveled along the old Peanut line to Caledonia. (I could not find an article in the *Gazette* about this excursion.) On that trip, Earl Bloss, a railroad fan, carried an unused excursion ticket for the Canandaigua-Niagara Fall Railroad from LeRoy to the Falls, dated August 24, 1853. (Wonder where that ticket is now?)



**Limestone bridge abutment on the west side of Oatka Creek which is probably the Peanut line.**



**LeRoy's three railroad bridges. Top to bottom: NY Central "peanut line"; Erie; Buffalo, Pittsburgh and Rochester. The top two are gone now.**