

# Dedication of Lyon Brook Bridge exhibit

By John Taibi

On December 5, 2010, the Chenango County Historical Society, 25 Rexford Street, Norwich, New York, dedicated its new outdoor exhibit designed to perpetuate the memory of the New York, Ontario & Western Railway's Lyon Brook Bridge.



***A decorative roof, supported by steel rails, covers the CCHS museum's new exhibit on the Lyon Brook Bridge. At its base is the 1894 date stone and story board with a section of steel girder between. The O&W logo, fashioned by volunteer Jim LoPiccolo, provides an exclamation point to the importance of the railroad to Norwich.***

Funded through a grant from the Norwich Lions Club, Director Alan Estus, along with his assistant Diane, organized a group of volunteers to design, build, and bring to fruition this most recent exhibit, which is helping to bring about a complete modernization of the CCHS museum – both inside and out.

Incorporated into the exhibit are artifacts from the “new” bridge that was built in 1894, which include the date stone and a steel girder section, and a storyboard that – through photographs and captions – tells the story of both Lyon Brook Bridges that were erected by

the New York & Oswego Midland Railroad (1869) and New York, Ontario & Western Railway (1894).

On Dedication day, at 2PM, a crowd of nearly 60 persons gathered in a wintry setting, to listen to speakers and to witness the unveiling of the exhibit.

In my remarks, I advised the interested people that: “The Lyon Brook Bridge was one of Chenango County’s most notable engineering feats. It was over 800 feet long, and soared 160 feet over the brook whose name it bears. When it was first built, we visited it to watch in amazement as the structure took shape over a gorge then thought to be unbridgeable. Then, when it was completed in 1869, we were in attendance to witness the first train to cross from hill to hill, or maybe even witness disaster if the bridge failed! But, it held fast and did so for another 25 years until it was replaced by a new bridge.

“When the new Lyon Brook Bridge was under construction, we again visited the site to watch, again in amazement, as the new steel structure took shape surrounding the old iron trestle, while at the same time not delaying the passage of a single train! That’s quite a feat on a stretch of single track railroad. But, the O&W’s assistant engineer, Curtis E. Knickerbocker, was up to the task and when the new bridge was finished the old bridge was dismantled from under it.

“So, you may be asking yourself, ‘why we are not at the site of the bridge to celebrate its memory rather than here in Norwich many miles away?’ The answer is that it was the Lyon Brook Bridge that allowed the City of Norwich to become the great railroad center that it was.

“During 1867, Norwich offered up to an incredible amount of \$1,000,000 in construction aid to any railroad that brought its line directly into the community. At that time, President Littlejohn of the NY&OMRR, was projecting his railroad to pass to the north of Norwich but, learning of the community’s financial desire to assist in having a railroad, he altered the course of the line and history. The obstacle, however, was crossing the gorge of Lyon Brook.

“But, the bridge was indeed completed,

Norwich financed \$500,000 in construction aid – the second largest amount of aid provided to the railroad behind only Oswego, and Norwich did receive the railroad’s shops, yards, offices, station, and designation as the road’s Northern Division headquarters. It was the hundreds of men – and some women – who worked for the railroad that lived in Norwich, shopped locally, and paid taxes. Besides working in the shops, yards, and offices, and running trains across Lyon Brook Bridge, railroad employees were also merchants, school board members, aldermen, postmasters, and mayors. It was the Lyon Brook Bridge that made this all possible.

“Although the Lyon Brook Bridge was built to support the weight of a legion of passing trains, it was also a very humanly structure. It allowed us to walk across it, it enjoyed having its picture taken by us, it reveled in the gaiety of a picnic being held within its shadow, and it inspired affection and love.

“Therefore, when the Lyon Brook Bridge was dismantled 9 years after its railroad was abandoned, its “soul” was blown about by the winds of change and fell upon those people whose lives are touched by its onetime presence. I never knew the Lyon Brook Bridge, but I believe I have part of it within my heart and soul – and I think you do too, otherwise you wouldn’t be here today. The Lyon Brook Bridge transcends its job of shouldering the weight of passing trains, which it did very well, in that it is still fondly remembered many ordinary people who recognized it as a wonderful structure that was important to the livelihood of families and Norwich alike. That is the great success of the bridge, and that is why we are here today to celebrate its memory.



“At this time, I would like to ask Helen Ogden LoPiccolo to unveil this new exhibit for you to admire. In 1944, Helen and her boyfriend Dominic LoPiccolo visited the Lyon Brook

Bridge, along with his Section foreman father and mother. When Helen and Dominic left the bridge that day they had become engaged to be married. The Lyon Brook Bridge, it seems, was a pretty good match maker, too!”

With these remarks concluded, Mrs. LoPiccolo pulled away the cloth and uncovered the story board (**below**) for this new exhibit, and it was then that it was officially dedicated.



If you have not been to the Chenango County Historical Society museum lately, please return soon for a visit. You will find that it is undergoing a complete transformation because of a reawakening and commitment by the museum’s board of directors and the creativeness of its new director, Alan Estus. Go to Norwich to see this exhibit, and at the same time revel within the community that was at one time a great railroad town.

***Left- After the dedication ceremony, CCHS Director Alan Estus (left), Helen LoPiccolo, and her son Jim proudly pose with the museum’s new exhibit.***