

**TRAINS, MULES,
AND SQUIRREL WHISKEY
A Slightly "Fractured" Fairytale
of Life Along the NYO&W Railway**



Postcard showing O&W Station, Pennellville, NY

The newspaper story reprinted below, which I presume to be (sort of, more-or-less) true, was originally published in the December 24, 1980 issue of the "Citizen Outlet," in a column called "The Pennellville Pathfinder." I came across it totally by accident, when a yellowed newspaper clipping fell out of an old OWRHS Observer that I had bought through eBay. There is no such newspaper operating in Pennellville, NY today – at least none that I could find in the phone book – and no specific author for the column is given. But wherever they are, I hope they'll not mind our reproducing their humorous local history column from more than a quarter century ago.

The Pennellville Pathfinder

A mule is a hybrid animal and it cannot reproduce. It is the offspring of the union between a jackass and a mare horse. The Pendergasts were farmers on the West side of the river from Phoenix. Besides

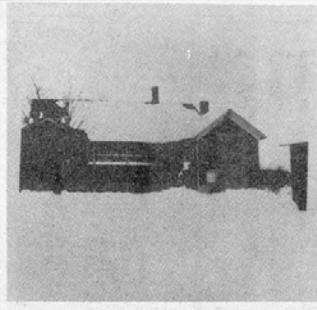
raising horses, they raised a lot of mules for work on the towpath of Oswego Canal which ran through Phoenix. Stub Pendergast, to improve his breeding stock, ordered a Jackass from out West. One winter's



day he got word from Clarence TenBroeck at the O & W R.R. station in Pennellville that the jack had arrived in a crate and was getting deathly cold in the unheated baggage room. There were two Stephen Pendergasts - one lived up the River Rd. and the other lived down it. One was called Stub and the other Steve to tell them apart, or, they were referred to as "the Pendergast up the river" or "the Pendergast down the river." Stub hooked up a team to his bob sled, got Steve to help him, and headed for Pennellville to get the jack before it froze to death.

Am Gregg ran the Pennellville Hotel for 60 years. He was known far and wide for the powerful whiskey he served, and which everyone referred to as "Squirrel Whiskey" 'cause one drink made you run around in circles and two drinks would make you go climb a tree.

Stub and Steve arrived at the Pennellville Station



Pennellville Hotel in winter. Steve went over to get some Squirrel whiskey to thaw the animal out.



O & W railroad station at Pennellville. View from the East. The jack was getting deathly cold waiting in the crate in the baggage room.

in good time. They took one look at the jackass in the crate and decided he needed a little help to recover from the long stay in the unheated quarters. He sent Steve over to Am Gregg's hotel a stone's throw away, to fetch a little of Am's squirrel whiskey to give to the

jack to thaw him out. The two uncrated the freezing animal and held him while they poured the potent drink down the jack's throat.

The waiting room for the train adjoined the room they were in. It was on a lower level. The stove-pipe from the coal heater in the waiting room led

through the wall and crossed horizontally over the stairs down to the room, and was connected into a chimney.

Stub and Steve were having a tussle getting the jack back in the crate. The infusion of alcohol had given the creature new strength. Finally, the jack broke loose and headed for the waiting room and the way outdoors. In the middle of his run he saw the stairs. Being a range animal he evidently viewed the strange woodwork as part of the great divide and instantly decided to jump it. He literally flew broadside into the overhead stovepipe, and crashed to the floor with pieces of pipe and avalanche of soot on top of him and all over the station. The station agent was fuming. Soot was burned in the stove. It made twice as much soot as the harder kind. Stub and Steve, after they had helped TenBroeck clean up, finally got the jack bundled up in the crate and on the bobs ready for the home trip. Steve looked at Stub and said, "Reckon that critter's got enough of that anti-freeze in him to last for the rest of the way, but right at this point I'm going to need some." Stub nodded in the affirmative and headed the team towards the hotel.

The two photographs included below were digitally scanned from this ancient news clipping – which explains the rather poor quality of their reproduction here. (*Clipping from the Citizen Outlet newspaper, publisher unknown*)

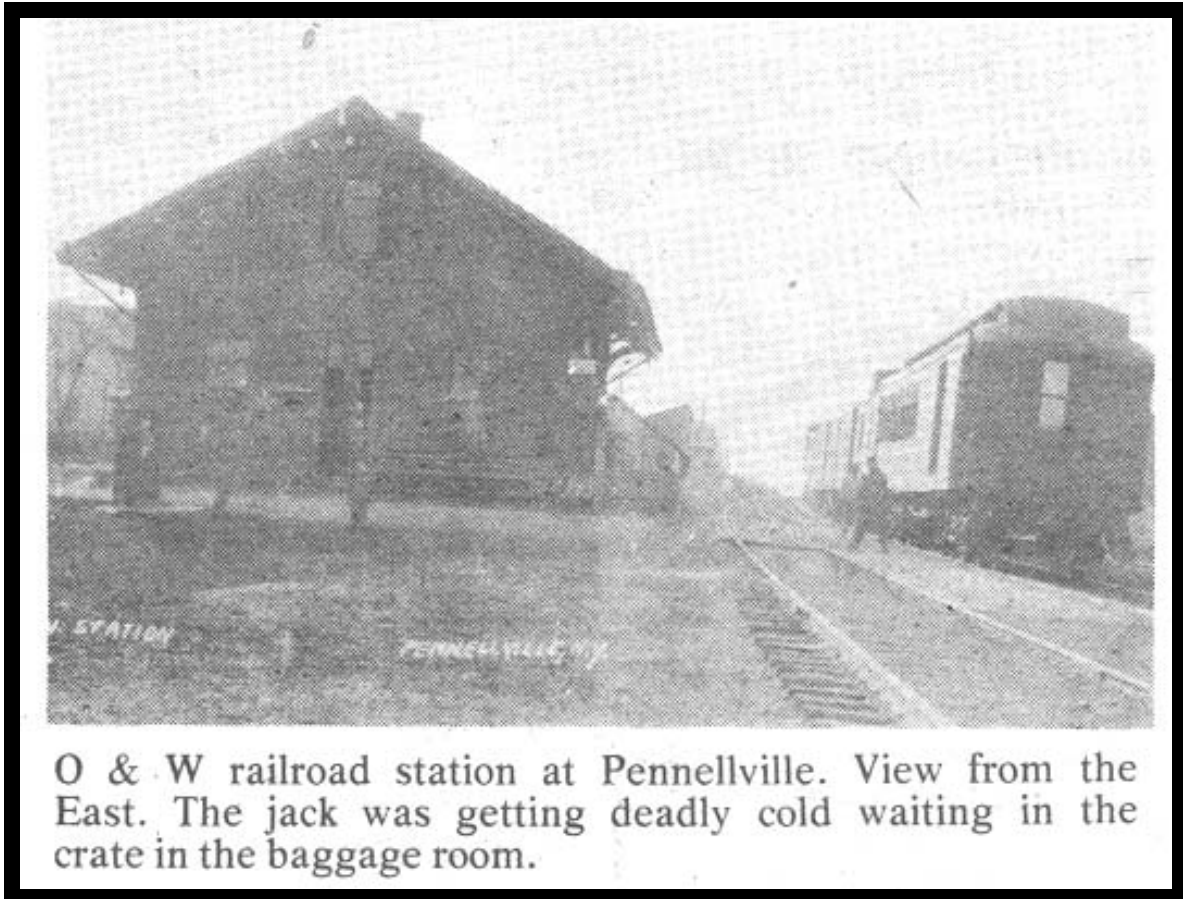
The Pennellville Pathfinder

"The Stephen Pendergasts were farmers on the west side of the Oswego River from Phoenix, NY. There were two Stephen Pendergasts – one lived up the River Road, and the other lived down it. One was called "Stub" and the other "Steve," to tell them apart – or, they were just referred to as "the Pendergast Up the River" and "the Pendergast Down the River."

Besides raising horses, the Pendergasts raised a lot of mules for work on the towpath of the Oswego Canal, which ran through Phoenix. A mule is a hybrid animal, and as such it cannot reproduce. It is the offspring of the union between a jackass and a mare horse.

Stub Pendergast, to improve his mule-breeding stock, ordered a jackass from Out West. One frigid winter's day, he got word from Station Agent Clarence TenBroeck over

at the NYO&W Railway station in Pennellville that the Jack had arrived in a crate, and was getting deathly cold in the unheated baggage room. Stub hooked up a team to his bob sled, got his brother Steve to help him, and headed for Pennellville to claim the Jack and get it home to a warm barn before it froze to death.

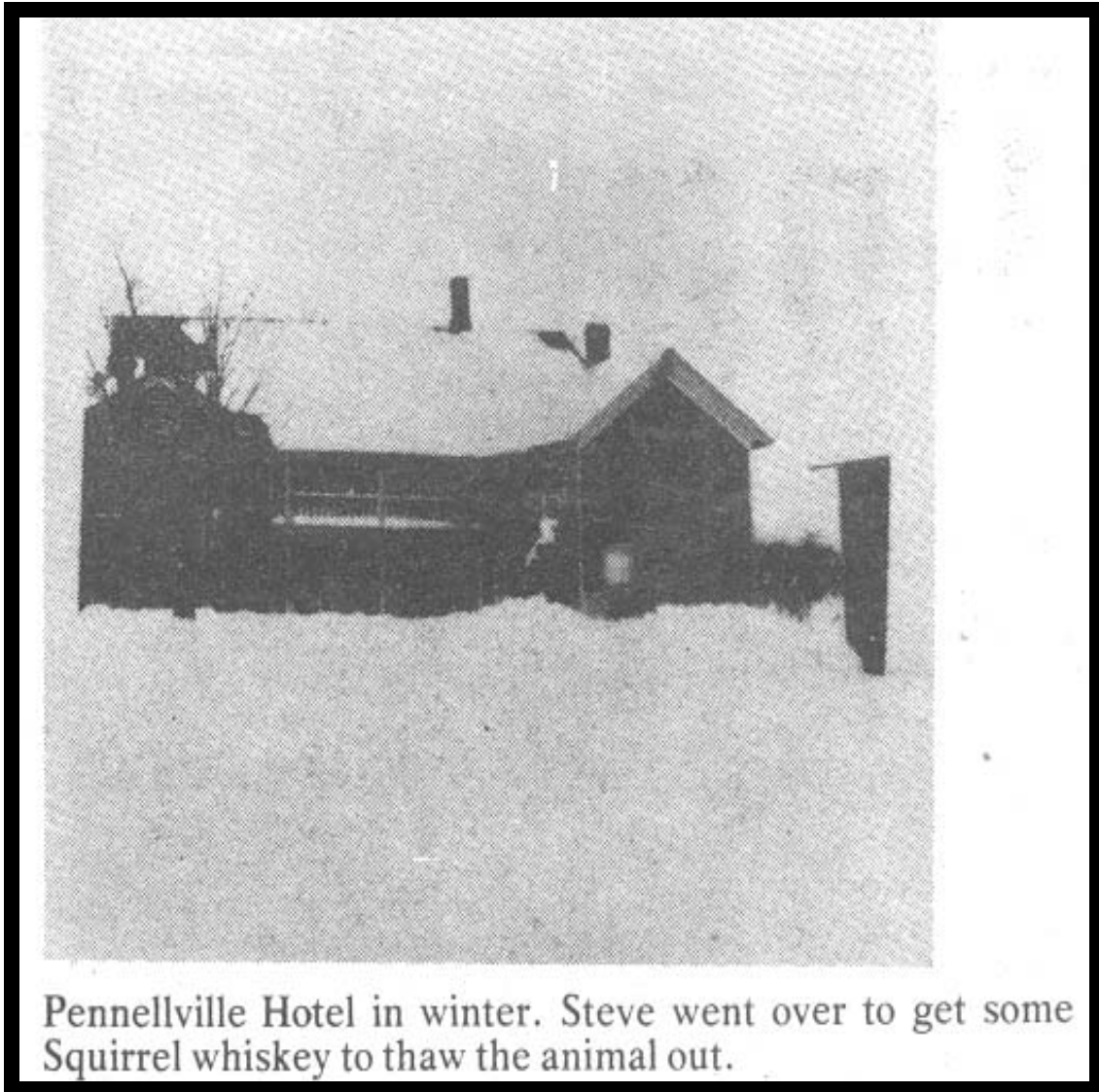


Stub and Steve arrived at the Pennellville O&W Station in good time. They took one look at the listless jackass in the frozen crate, and decided he needed a little help to recover from his long stay in the unheated quarters.

Am Gregg ran the Pennellville Hotel for 66 years. He was known far and wide for the powerful whiskey he served, which everyone referred to as "Squirrel Whiskey" – 'cause one drink made you run around in circles, and two drinks would make you go climb a tree. Stub sent Steve over to Am Gregg's hotel, a stone's throw away, to fetch a little of Am's squirrel whiskey to give to the Jack to "thaw him out." The two uncrated the freezing animal and held him while they poured the potent drink down his throat.

The waiting room for the train adjoined the freight room they were in. It was on a lower level. The stovepipe from the coal heater in the waiting room led through the wall and crossed horizontally over the stairs down to the room, where it was connected into a

chimney. Stub and Steve were having a bit of a tussle getting the jackass back in the crate. The infusion of alcohol had given the creature new strength.



Finally, the Jack broke loose completely and headed for the station waiting room and the way outdoors. In the middle of his run, he saw the stairs. Being a range animal, he evidently viewed the strange woodwork as part of the Great Divide, and instantly decided to jump it. He literally flew broadside into the overhead stovepipe, and crashed to the floor with pieces of the pipe and an avalanche of soot on top of him and all over the station.

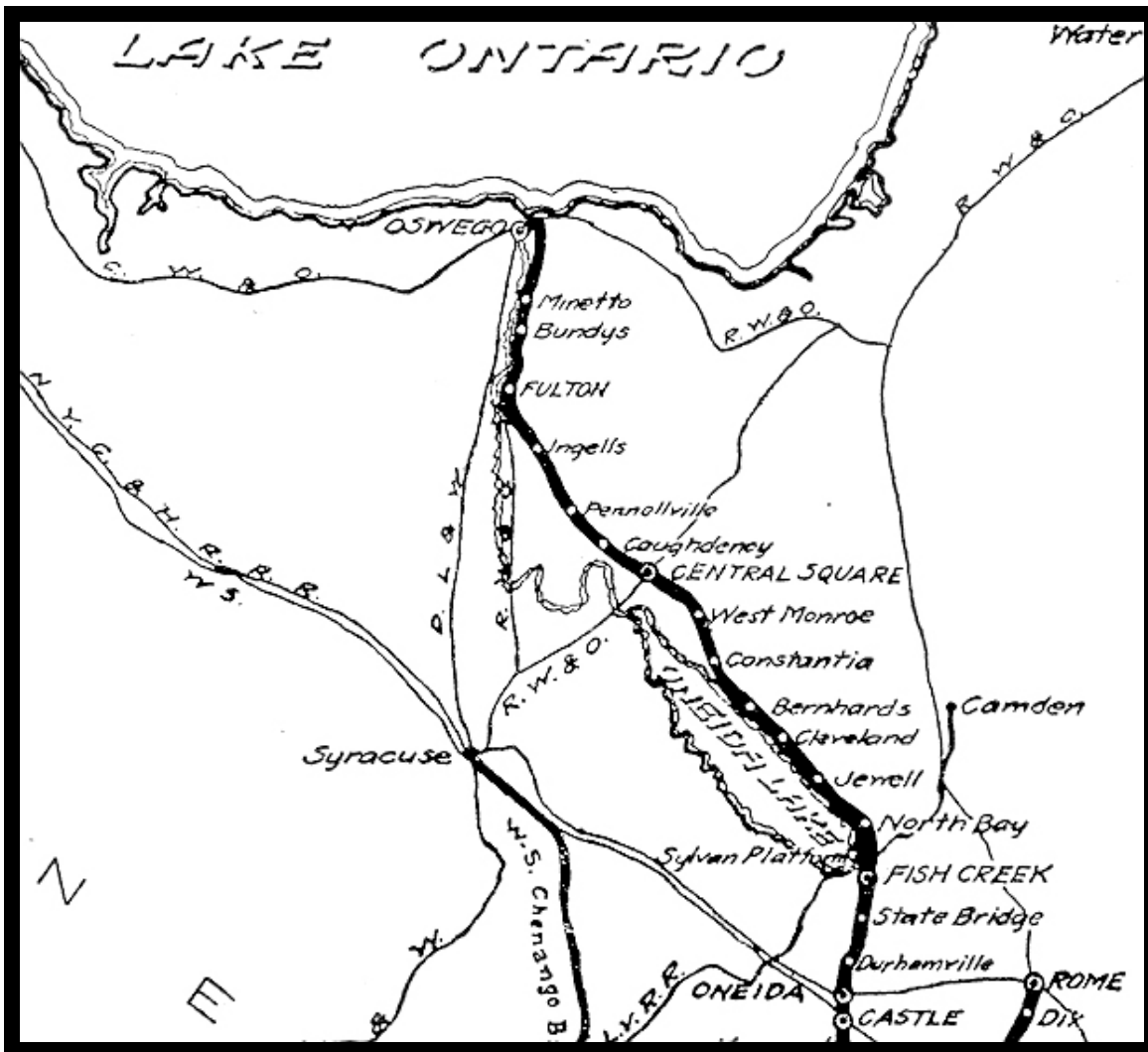
The O&W station agent was fuming. Soft coal was burned in the stove, and it made twice as much soot as the harder kind. Stub and Steve, after they had helped

TenBroeck clean up, finally got the jackass bundled up in the crate again and out on the bobs, ready for the home trip.

Steve looked at Stub and said, "I reckon that critter's got enough of that "anti-freeze" in him to last him for the rest of the way home – but right at this point, *I'm going to need some!*"

Stub nodded in the affirmative, and they headed the team over towards the hotel....”

“THE END”



As can be seen from the section of the O&W route map reproduced above, Pennellville, NY was a small station stop located north of Oneida Lake, a few towns south of Oswego. The 24 mile long Oswego Canal referred to in the story connected its more famous cousin, the Erie Canal near Syracuse, with

Lake Ontario. There is no date given for the story but canals, mules, coal stoves, and bob sleds were all still in daily use at the time. And Clarence TenBroeck was already the Pennellville station agent, living on the second floor of the depot with his family. That dates it to a bit more than a decade after the end of the 19th century, or thereabouts.

It's pretty unlikely that the feisty range animal featured in the story could have come from Away Out West in the Rocky Mountains, all the way to Upstate New York, cooped up in a tiny little crate the whole way. It had probably traveled most of the distance in a stock car, very likely routed through Chicago to the West Shore/New York Central & Hudson River R.R. for the trip as far as Syracuse, NY. There it would have been crated up and put aboard a passenger train, to be shipped as regular baggage, for the trip over the O&W Railway – and the last short leg of a long, strange journey to its new home.

Perhaps the Jack had traveled via the Rome, Watertown, and Ogdensburg R.R. (also then controlled by the NYC), which interchanged with the O&W just south of Pennellville at the little town of Central Square, NY. Or, it may have come via the more direct interchange at Oneida Castle, a slightly longer journey but one eliminating the RW&ORR leg of the trip. (No sense in cutting yet *another* railroad in on a share of the freight charges!) Either way, by the time it arrived at the Pennellville, NY passenger station via baggage car on the O&W, it was definitely one exceptionally well-traveled jackass.

Stories like this one are welcome portraits of life along the NYO&W Railway in its prime. They preserve memories of an earlier era, a time when the world was younger and seemed larger, when the town railroad station was still the vital center of daily life, and when virtually anything one might care to buy was delivered by the train – even a live jackass, packaged up in a wooden crate....

[Checking a modern map of the town of Phoenix, NY, reveals that the main road west of the old Oswego Canal has since been renamed "Pendergast Road." This suggests that the two Steven Pendergasts ultimately became quite prominent citizens in those parts. Their mule-raising business must have prospered indeed, no doubt in part due to all the hard-working offspring produced by their newly acquired – and apparently very energetic – rail-riding Jack.]