

"I've Been Working on the Railroad:"

Researching and Writing on the
Middletown & New Jersey Railroad

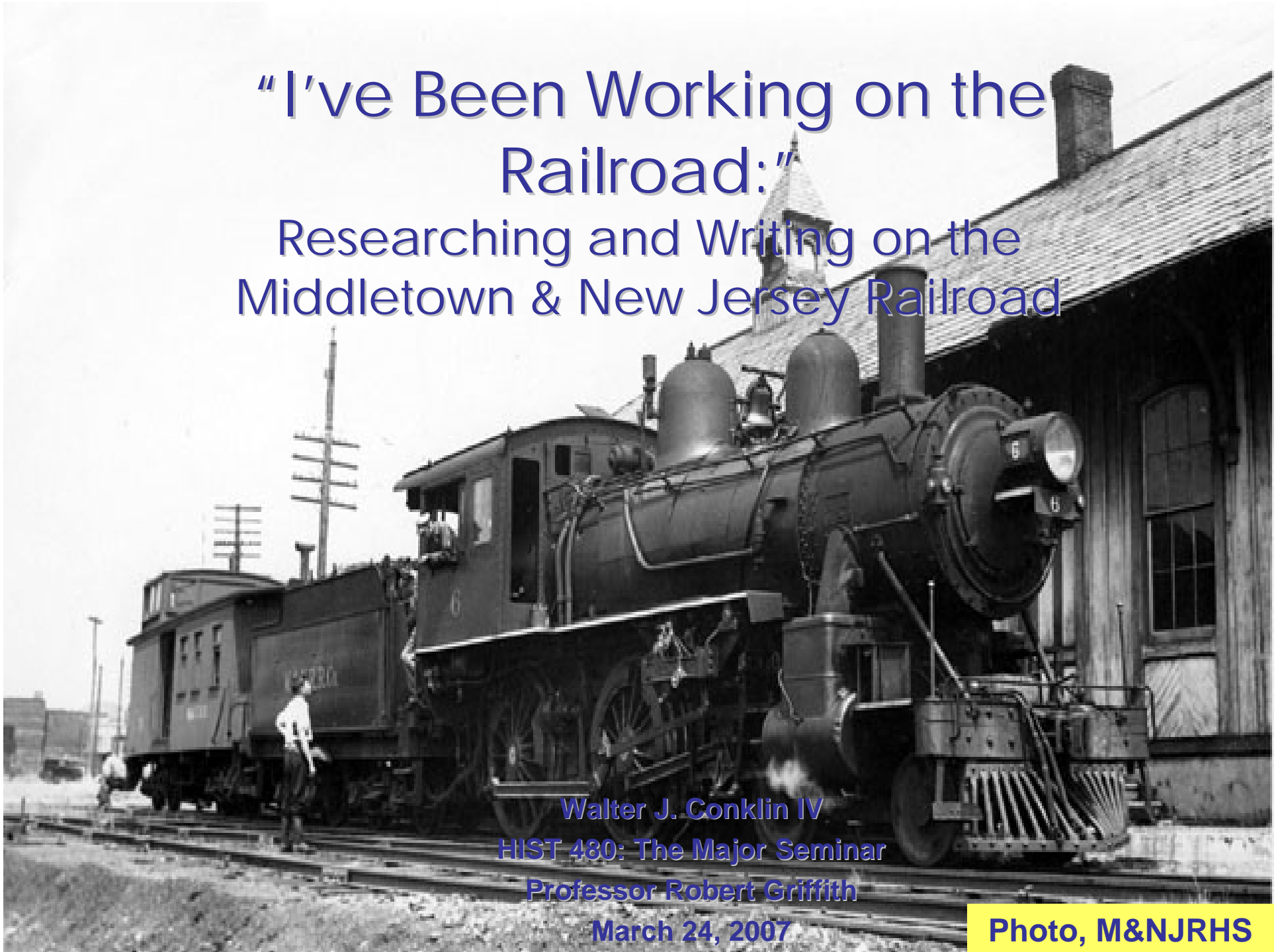
Walter J. Conklin IV

HIST 480: The Major Seminar

Professor Robert Griffith

March 24, 2007

Photo, M&NJRHS



Purpose of Research

- **To show that the Middletown & New Jersey Railway (M&NJ) and its predecessor lines, the Middletown, Unionville, and Water Gap Railroad (MU&WG) and Middletown & Unionville Railroad (M&U), have served as a vital lifeline for the Minisink Valley.**
- **To prove that the M&NJ and its predecessors have in the process had a profound role in shaping the economic development of the region surrounding Middletown as evident by its milk traffic.**
- **To prove that the M&NJ and its predecessors not only brought about the economic development of the region surrounding Middletown. These railroads influenced the social and cultural development as well with naming the communities it passed through during the construction of the right-of-way, and transporting students.**

A Brief History of the M&NJ:

- The M&NJ traces its inception back to the Middletown & Unionville and Water Gap, which began in 1866.
- The region that these related railroads have called home since 1866, with the inception of the MU&WG, was made up of rural villages, family-run farms, and creameries located outside of Middletown, New York.
- The purpose of establishing the line was to connect the burgeoning industrial center of Middletown, NY, with its several factories and shops, and the outlying region comprised of farms and small towns.



Themes

- The drive to link the rural regions of the country with the growing urban areas to facilitate trade. This is evident with the establishment of the M&UGW.
- The loss of the passenger business that the M&U experienced in the 1930s was a national trend.
- The rise and fall of the dairy industry had a profound impact on the railroad.
- Evolution from a steam railroad hauled passenger and milk to a hauler of farms products and now plastics.



A Concise History of Shipping Milk by Rail

- The nature of milk in being highly susceptible to spoilage originally restricted the market base of this product.
- Prior to the establishment of transporting fluid milk via rail, local farmers would convert any milk remaining from their own consumption, that of their family, and from selling it in their local community into butter.
- The reason was that milk could not be transported over long distances because of spoilage.
- This limited market changed with the start of railroads.
- With the arrival of the railroad and freight service, farmers could now transport dairy products such as milk, buttermilk, and cream in large quantities without it becoming spoiled in the ideal situation.

A Concise History of Shipping Milk by Rail con't

- Milk was originally transported in wooded churns used in making butter.
- These were soon replaced by metal cans, which could hold more milk and withstand the rolling back and forth nature of the freight cars and other conditions.
- Before the implementation of the standard 40-quart milk cans, these cans came in various sizes. Farmers shipped their milk in large 40-quart metal cans that would insulate the milk and prevent it from spilling during transit.
- Milk was later on transported in refrigerated boxcars and tankcars



Milk and the M&U

- Milk and other dairy products were the major commodities transported by the M&U.
- The M&U hauled more milk mile per mile than any other railroad that provided milk service to the New York metropolitan region.
- This unique distinction in one way attests to the contribution that the M&NJ and its predecessors have made to the region outside of Middletown.
- Over the decades, the milk service evolved from the railroad picking up the milk and dairy products at rural outposts and at the regular stations to serving over hundred farms and several large creameries.
- The production of condensed milk greatly affected the M&U as this product with its reduced weight and volume diminished the railroad's revenue. The change over of the M&U's milk traffic to trucks was a gradual process. Shippers went back in forth between using the railroad and trucking companies to get the best price possible.



The M&NJ's Milk Traffic:

- Over the decades, the M&U enjoyed significant revenue from its milk traffic along with that from livestock feed and coal.
- For example, the milk traffic on the M&NJ in the early 1920s was sixty-six percent of the railroad's total revenue [1]. This percentage did not even diminish greatly during the midst of the Great Depression.
- Despite the small size of this 14.5-mile shortline, the M&U hauled more milk, mile for mile, hauled more milk than any other railroad in the New York metropolitan region and most likely in the United States.
- This statement underscores the important role of the railroad to the communities located along its line.

[1] Deserto, John. "Milk Money and the M&NJ's Claim to Fame." Accessed March 31, 2007. Available http://M&NJRHS.org/milk_money.html.



Milk train on the M&U circa early 1940s



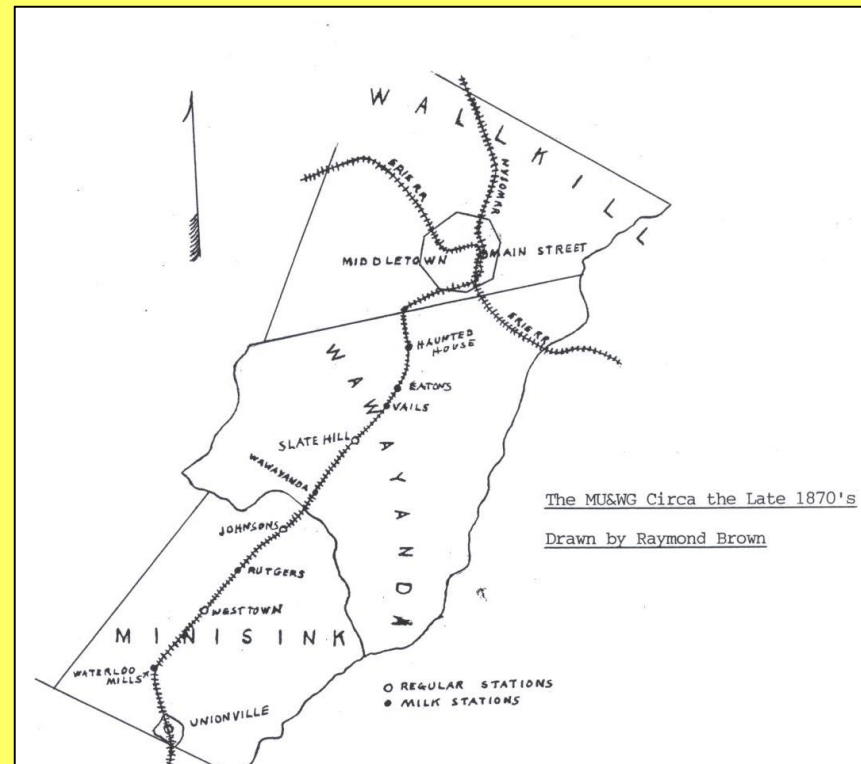
Photo, M&NJRHS

The M&U's Milk Traffic cont:

- As it was for the MUW&G, milk represented an important commodity for the railroad and the local dairy industry over the course of history of the M&U. In fact, the M&U hauled more milk, mile per mile, than any the other railroads the provided milk service to New York city and the surrounding region.
- The reason for the M&U's claim to fame was because of the several farms, creameries, and condensaries that shipped milk by rail at this time.
- The other component was because of the small size of the route, which at its longest mileage comprised of almost 15-miles.
- Statistical analysis of the amount of milk shipped over the M&U supports this claim that the line transported more traffic on a mile per mile basis than compared to other regional railroads.
- During the times when other railroads leased the M&U, the inclusion of the latter in calculating the total number of milk cans transported per mile elevated the leasing railroad to become the dominant carrier of the regional lines that served the New York metropolitan region.

New York City's Milk RRs

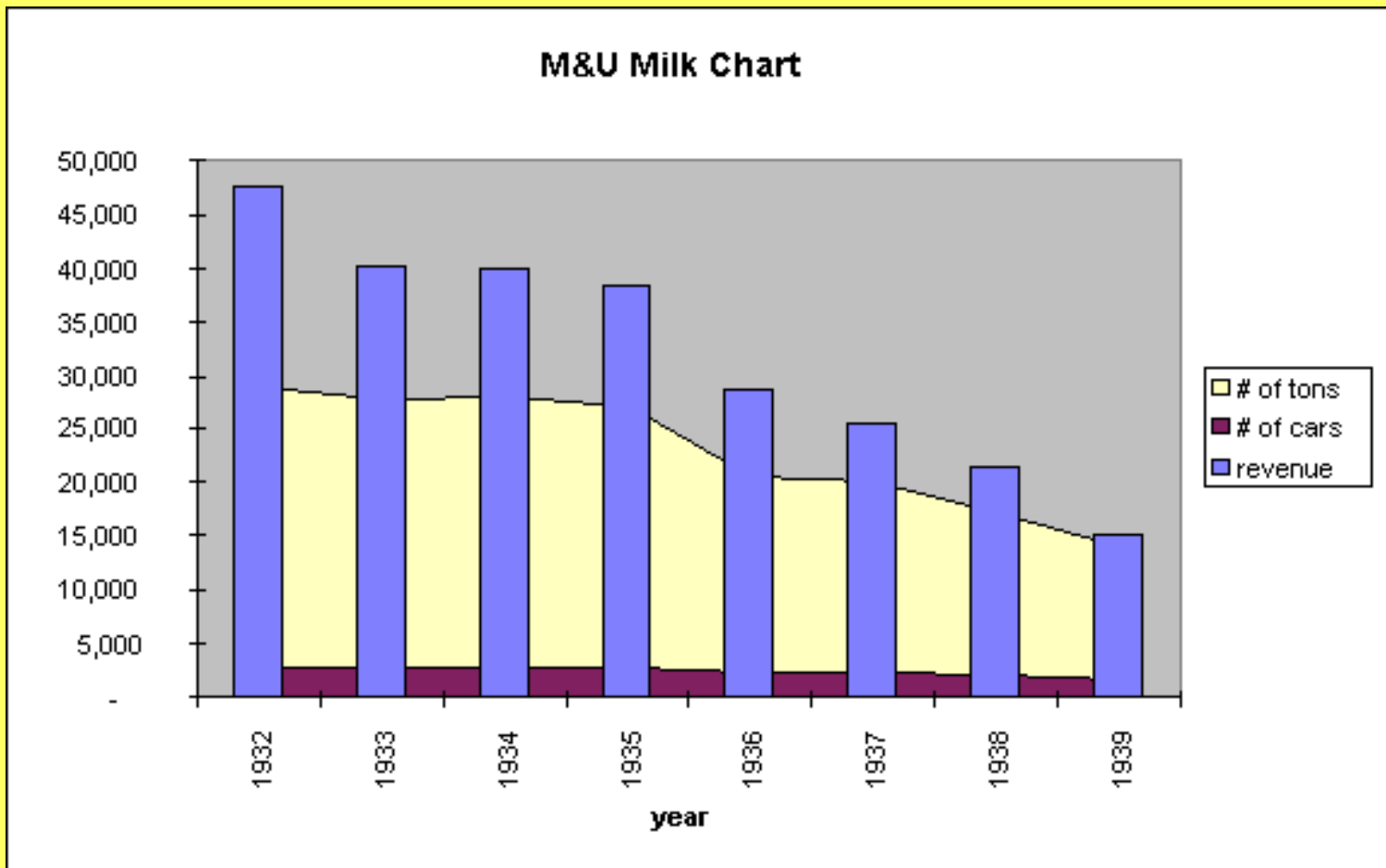
- During various times over the course of the history of the M&U and its predecessor the M&UWG, these three railroads, the ER, O&W, S&W, had operated the M&U and M&UWG as branch lines.
- The Erie was the first railroad to provide rail service to New York City as the company benefited from going through Pennsylvania and Orange County.
- The O&W also had a large share of the milk business because it went through Orange County and other rural parts of upstate New York.
- The S&W was the smallest of the four railroads and served the rural communities of northern New Jersey. The S&W, nevertheless, because of the 14.5-mile M&U, which the S&W leased until 1913, hauled the most milk mile per mile than the other railroads.



Comparison of Major Milk Carriers into New York City Area in 1896

Railroad	40 Qrt Cans	Total Miles	Cans per Mile	Qrts per Mile
Erie	1,419,991	998.00	1,422.84	56,913.60
O&W	736,162	324.00	2,272.10	90,884.00
S&W(MU&WG)	429,161	88.00	4,876.83	195,073.20

M&U's Milk traffic cont:



[3] Deserto, John. "Milk Money and the M&NJ's Claim to Fame."
Accessed 21 November 2006. Available
http://M&NJRHS.org/milk_money.html.

Select Bibliography of Sources & Historiographical Methodology

I. Milk traffic reports

II. Waybills invoices used by railroads to track freight.

Note: Amount of freight transported

Note: Name of shipper

Note: Originating railroad

Note: Connecting railroads

Note: Destination railroad

III. Financial Records

IV. Timetables

VI. Railroad maps: purpose is to help me place the M&NJ within the context of railroading in Middletown.

VII. Newspapers clippings and photos

Brill, Peter. "Getting to School on the M&U was not always easy Part I."

Accessed 21 November 2005. <http://mnjrhs.org/school.html>.

Deserto, John. "Milk Money and the M&NJ's Claim to Fame." Accessed 21 November 2006. Available http://M&NJRHS.org/milk_money.html.

Contributions of Research to RR and Local History

- Refinement of the argument previously made, though not supported, that the “M&U hauled more milk on mile per mile basis than any other railroad in the United States.”
- Replaced with the argument that the M&U hauled more milk than any other railroad in the NYC region.
- Investigation of additional evidence to support this assertion.



The Legacy of the M&NJ and its predecessors

- As compared with the M&NJ's diminished, though still important, role today, the railroad and its predecessors provided valuable rail service to both Middletown and the surrounding area for many years.
- This service was essential for the region outside of Middletown. The predecessor lines of the M&NJ helped local businesses and farmers ship milk and receive goods.
- Demonstrative of this role was the fact that the M&U hauled more milk mile per mile than another railroad in the New York City metropolitan region.
- As with the milk traffic, the M&U provided another invaluable service. Those inhabitants who lived in the surrounding area could take the train into Middletown for pleasure or business.
- During the school year, the railroad transported students from the area to Middletown where they attended high school.
- The MUW&G and the M&U have thereby played a dynamic role in the socioeconomic development of the region outside of Middletown.