

# Rolling stock moves on



GEORGE CEFFERILLO of Mechanicville, N.Y. was conductor on the Boston & Maine's NE-1 freight train. He rode shotgun in the locomotive with Ed Cushing. Both are veteran railroad men.

Two hours after it left the East Deerfield railroad yard, the Boston & Maine freight train NE-1 was barreling through Petersburg Junction, N.Y. All five guys on the train were looking for deer.

"Herds of them go through here. Herds of them," said George N. Cefferillo, the conductor in the lead locomotive. "We hit 'em all the time. You can't help it."

No deer were mowed down on this trip. No deer were there at all in Petersburg, and Cefferillo guessed it was because it was the middle of a sunny afternoon.

So things got monotonous again after Petersburg until the radio box in the cab of the locomotive began to carry some live music. It was Gary Palmer singing back in the caboose, coming across the radio sounding like a trombone, "Sweet Georgia Brown."

The engineer, Edward Cushing, and Cefferillo kept rocking with the train, looking ahead and grinning while the music played on there in the Hoosac River valley on the Boston & Maine tracks.

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There was more action before the train left the East Deerfield yard. NE-1 had left Fitchburg at dawn, with the same crew of five, and it got to East Deerfield with 127 cars at about 12:30.

John Vasquez, the tower man at East Deerfield, was talking on the radios, "playing train," telling drivers which tracks to use and when to use them. The wrecker train with crane and dining car pulled out toward Rotterdam Junction, N.Y., to handle a derailment. Vasquez said NE-1 was finally coming in, and he watched for the red, white- and blue-painted diesel engine because he had designed the American flag paint job on that engine two years ago.

With Cushing in the driver's seat of NE-1, working the levers in front of him, leaning out the window looking back, the train let go of a hundred cars and one locomotive. Then it pulled up

slowly to the Hope Street signal and backed into the yard to pick up 41 new cars. Those maneuvers took about an hour. Then Cushing got the go-ahead from the yard tower and yanked the cars forward going west toward Mechanicville, N.Y., another large Boston & Maine freight yard.

This was heavy machinery bound for Mechanicville by rail. The train carried more than 3,000 tons in 67 cars. Three 2,000-horsepower diesel engines, 4 years old, generated thousands of volts of electricity to run 12 electric motors to drive the cranks for the wheels of the locomotives.

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Riding up front in a locomotive means jostling back and forth on jump seats, bouncing up and down sometimes, a constant steady clatter of heavy steel and looking out the windows. It's an incessant rhythmic bass tone, enough to make animals and people look up and keep looking when the train goes by, shaking the earth. Out there along the Deerfield River bank there is plenty of room for the train because the trees are mowed down for 20 feet on either side of the tracks. They say the "brushcutter" had been there.

This is heavy, driving, powerful machinery moving steel on steel on rock.

The train gets a different view of Greenfield than we do. It sees the backside of the church steeples and downtown. It rises on a trestle to the ridge west of the Green River and above the interstate highway. The train rocks on, curling along the bank of the Deerfield River until crossing it above Bardwell's Ferry. It passes what the trainmen call the "weeping rocks" this side of Shelburne Falls. Thick, bulbous white ice formations on the side of the ledge at a point where two years ago the bank caved in and down toward the river.

"I love this valley. It's really a pretty place," said conductor Cefferillo.

The trainmen ride, watching for signals, watching for problems and watch-

ing the towns, the hills and the rivers. They remember what's happened along the route back through the years — the derailment at Bardwell's Ferry; an explosion of a gas tanker in Shelburne Falls; the ski slope in Charlemon; the upper dam at the Bear Swamp hydroelectric plant; slamming into a car a few weeks ago in Petersburg, just missing the driver and dragging the car for a few hundred yards.

After Charlemon, the train leaves the river and winds up into the mountain.

Then there is the Hoosac Tunnel. A completely opposite place. Four miles of dusty darkness.

Entering the tunnel is like entering a cave on the wings of a bat. Frozen white lime stalactite icicles 20 feet long hang from the ceiling. The train sends a headlight beam onto the track, and it moves through the tunnel at about 25 miles per hour. The rumbling is loud. Roaring. In the cab no one talks. Only the rumbling carries through the dark tunnel because all else is suspended, waiting for the white spot.

You can't tell where that spot is going to be. It's suddenly there against the dusty black wall, and it wobbles up and down, from side to side, and it grows from the center. It's a hole in the mountain. In the train you just head toward it. You go through a shaft that's been patched and shored up against whatever can drip into a rock tunnel toward that bright spot. It grows quickly into a wide hole. The train busts through it with no winding down relief. The relief is only in the history books.

This train, NE-1, is bound for Mechanicville and has passed the west portal of the first rock tunnel ever built, and it just keeps rolling, pulling cars out of the hole.

The men on NE-1 are railroad men. The brakeman, fireman and flagman are the younger guys; the engineer and the conductor are the older guys. They're all sons of railroad men. George Cefferillo's father was with the railroad for 50 years. His grandfather

*Text and Photos  
By Michael Gery*

worked for the Delaware & Hudson for 51 years.

They know their work. They know when the signals will come into view — red light to wait for another train to pass onto one of the double lines, yellow light to go slow. They flip through the sheets that tell the story of the cars on this train — who owns them, where they came from, where they're going, what they carry, what they weigh and whether there are dangerous cargos or "pigs" (piggy-backs are the cars which carry truck trailers). They know the dams on the rivers and what to look for at crossings. They wave to Boston & Maine executives walking the tracks in coats and ties next to the Boston & Maine railriding passenger van. They don't believe the teen-agers walking the tracks flipping stones. They rumble through North Adams, watching the downtown redevelopment. They wait the horn before crossings in remote parts of east Rensselaer County, N.Y. They watch to see who waves.

They all say they like their work, but they don't know why.

"What's the great fascination with the trains?" asked flagman Jerry Maratto. "You always see guys hanging around the tracks with cameras and all that. What's that all about?"

"The colors of a train? The power of a train? The history of a train? The places a train has traveled? The romantic life of a train and trainmen?"

"Little do they know," Jerry Maratto said. "Little do they know."

NE-1 arrived in Mechanicville at 4:30 p.m. The crew lived in Mechanicville or nearby towns. They were glad to be home for supper. The next day they were due at the yard at 5 in the morning to find out where they'd be going.



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## Federal help to fix the line

The Boston & Maine Railroad was the only railroad of nine bankrupt lines in the Northeast that did not join the federally-subsidized Conrail system in 1973. Because of that, B&M is the only "competitor" to Conrail in this part of the country.

The Regional Rail Reorganization Act of 1973 and the Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform Act of 1976 provided for the largest corporate reorganization in the nation's history. The 1973 act united eight bankrupt railroads into the Conrail freight and Amtrak passenger train systems. It made available \$2.1 billion for Conrail, and also authorized \$1.6 billion in loans and guarantees for rehabilitation of non-Conrail railroads.

The 1977 Congress passed a transportation appropriations bill late in 1977 which made available \$200 million of the loan and guarantee money through the Federal Railroad Administration. The B&M applied for \$26 million to perform extensive rehabilitation of its 156-mile main line from Ayer, Mass., to Mechanicville, N.Y.

A spokesman for the Federal Railroad Administration told The Recorder a "financing arrangement and approved work program" for the B&M should be settled by this summer.

Two-thirds of the B&M traffic

travels the main line. The rehabilitation project calls for installing 83 miles of continuous welded rail to replace the 40-year-old jointed rail now in use along that line. In addition, the loan would make some basic roadbed improvements, install an in-track signal system in place of the lines now used, repair 38 steel and masonry bridges and place a steel liner in 300 feet of the Hoosac Tunnel.

The long-term, low-interest federal loan is expected to provide about 150 jobs on the railroad.

The B&M annually sends a maintenance crew onto the lines to make routine repairs. That crew will begin work April 3. This year, the New England Regional Commission, a clearinghouse for federal monies, will foot the \$435,000 labor bill for that work while the railroad will supply the equipment and materials.

This year's maintenance calls for extensive work at the East Deerfield freight yard, according to James Shay at the B&M engineering department. The yard will get 18,000 new ties and 2,400 switch timbers under 90 connections. A total of 238,000 ties will be replaced along the main line this summer. The East Deerfield-to-Shelburne Falls-stretch will get 6,300 of those ties.

Rep. Silvio O. Conte, R-Pittsfield,

is one of the greatest advocates of the New England railroad business. He continually defends the use of government monies, such as the long-term loans for the B&M and the New England Regional Commission grants. He has been in the forefront in proposing legislation to aid the railroads.

Speaking of why the B&M needs support, Conte said the growth of the interstate highway system was an economic force that worked against the railroad.

"The high performance of the highways allowed trucks to become more efficient at the same time that rail lines in many areas were deteriorating and becoming less efficient," he said. "This allowed motor carriers to capture non-bulk, high-revenue rail traffic."

Conte noted the lopsided government support that has gone toward highway maintenance.

"The railroads have other problems," Conte said. "One is that they own and maintain their own rights-of-way. This large investment in rail property makes changes to the system more difficult. Whereas with most other modes of transportation, public backing undertakes the cost of planning, building and maintaining rights of way, the railroads themselves bear these large fixed expenses."



THE VIEW from a Boston & Maine locomotive westbound through Hoosick Falls, N.Y. The building on the left was once a railroad hotel.