

The Black Diamond

Official Newsletter of the Lehigh Valley Railroad Historical Society November 2025

Message from the Editor

The November 2025 edition of “The Black Diamond” provides full details about all Lehigh Valley Railroad Historical Society events during the year. Featured in this issue is an article about the history of the LVRR in Manchester written by Richard Palmer. Please send any Society news and/or historical articles about the Lehigh Valley Railroad to me by U. S. Mail at P. O. Box 200, Manchester, NY 14504-0200 or by e-mail at kemay59@hotmail.com. Thank you for your contributions.

Ken May, Editor

2025 Station Museum Open Houses

The Lehigh Valley Railroad Historical Society Station Museum was open to the public one Sunday afternoon a month from May to October this year. Open house dates were May 18, June 15, July 20, August 17, September 21, and October 19. Attendance at the open houses was very good. Thanks to the LVRRHS members who volunteered at the open houses.

Lehigh Valley Railroad Memorial Program

The Lehigh Valley Railroad Historical Society hosted the annual Lehigh Valley Railroad Memorial Program at our station museum on Saturday, April 12. The free event was a celebration of the history of the Lehigh Valley Railroad with a program of DVDs, slides, movies, photographs, and discussions. Doug Eisele gave a slide presentation about the last decades of LVRR operations in Upstate New York. Ken May gave a Powerpoint presentation about the LVRR Seneca Falls Branch. Thanks to everyone who participated in this year’s program.

Auburn Road Book Presentation

Kenneth May gave a Powerpoint presentation at the open house on Sunday, October 19, about the “Auburn Road” book that he co-authored with Richard Palmer which was published in the spring. The book covers the 190-year history of the Auburn Branch of the New York Central Railroad. Around 20 visitors attended the presentation.

2025 NYSCA/GHHN Conservation Grant Award

The Lehigh Valley Railroad Historical Society received an award from the New York State Council on the Arts/Greater Hudson Heritage Network Conservation Grant Program

in June. The funds were used to purchase preservation supplies for the museum archives. Thanks to Deb Halderman for submitting the grant application.

Manchester Pumpkin Walk Report by Deb Halderman

Betty McMahon and I represented the LVRRHS at the annual Pumpkin Walk at the Manchester Village Hall on Saturday, October 11. Despite the rain, the event was still pretty well attended. The Manchester Fire Department had an open house. There was music, food, and ice cream, and of course, lots of candy! The local dentist handed out bags with free toothbrushes and toothpaste to combat all that sugar!

Other groups represented at the event were the Red Jacket PTSA, Lions Club, Boy Scouts, Canandaigua YMCA, and a few others in another tent. We handed out some brochures and some flyers for the October 19 open house – and a fair amount of candy. It was fun, but very damp and chilly by the end of the evening. Thanks to the sponsors for providing tents, tables, and chairs for the participants.



LVRRHS Display at Manchester Pumpkin Walk (Deb Halderman Photograph)

2026 LVRRHS Annual Meeting Notice

The annual meeting of the Lehigh Valley Railroad Historical Society will be held on Sunday, January 18, 2026, at 2:00 p.m., at the Society's Station Museum at 8 East High Street in Shortsville, New York. Election results for officers and trustees will be announced, 2025 activities will be reviewed, and 2026 activities will be discussed at the meeting. The monthly meeting will be held after the annual meeting. All Society members are invited to attend as well as the public.

Collections Committee Report

Jack Tuttle, Deb Halderman, and Betty McMahon have been meeting on Wednesdays at the station museum to accession the Richard Pearson collection. Mark Skipworth and Ken May worked on organizing the library upstairs. Ken sorted out duplicate books to sell at our open houses.

LVRRHS Facebook Page

The Lehigh Valley Railroad Historical Society Facebook page has much more content added over the past year. Mark Skipworth has posted numerous historic photographs and postcards of LVRR locomotives, trains, structures, and facilities in Upstate New York from the Richard Pearson and Paul Templeton collections in the photos section.

Membership Renewals

If you have not already renewed your membership for 2025, we hope that you will renew now. Memberships received after September 30 will be considered good through 2026. We thank all of our members for their continued support of the Society.

Donations Needed

Please consider making a donation to the Society when renewing your membership. Funds are needed for museum operations. Thank you for your generosity.

Membership Drive

We are actively seeking new members for the Society. Please ask anyone that you know with an interest in railroads to join our group. They can print and fill out the membership application from the Join section of our website. Thank you for your support.

LVRRHS Website

Visit the Lehigh Valley Railroad Historical Society website at www.lvrrhs.org for the latest information about Society activities.

LVRRHS Information

“The Black Diamond” is published by the Lehigh Valley Railroad Historical Society, P. O. Box 200, Manchester, NY 14504-0200. Displays and archives are located at 8 East High Street in Shortsville, New York. Contact the museum at 585-289-9149 and leave a message for a return call.

Officers and Trustees of the Lehigh Valley Railroad Historical Society

President:	David Halderman
Vice President:	Kenneth May
Treasurer:	Deborah Halderman
Secretary:	Deborah Halderman
Trustees:	Joseph Dickson Rita Gurewitch Beverly Halderman Betty McMahon Mark Skipworth Jack Tuttle



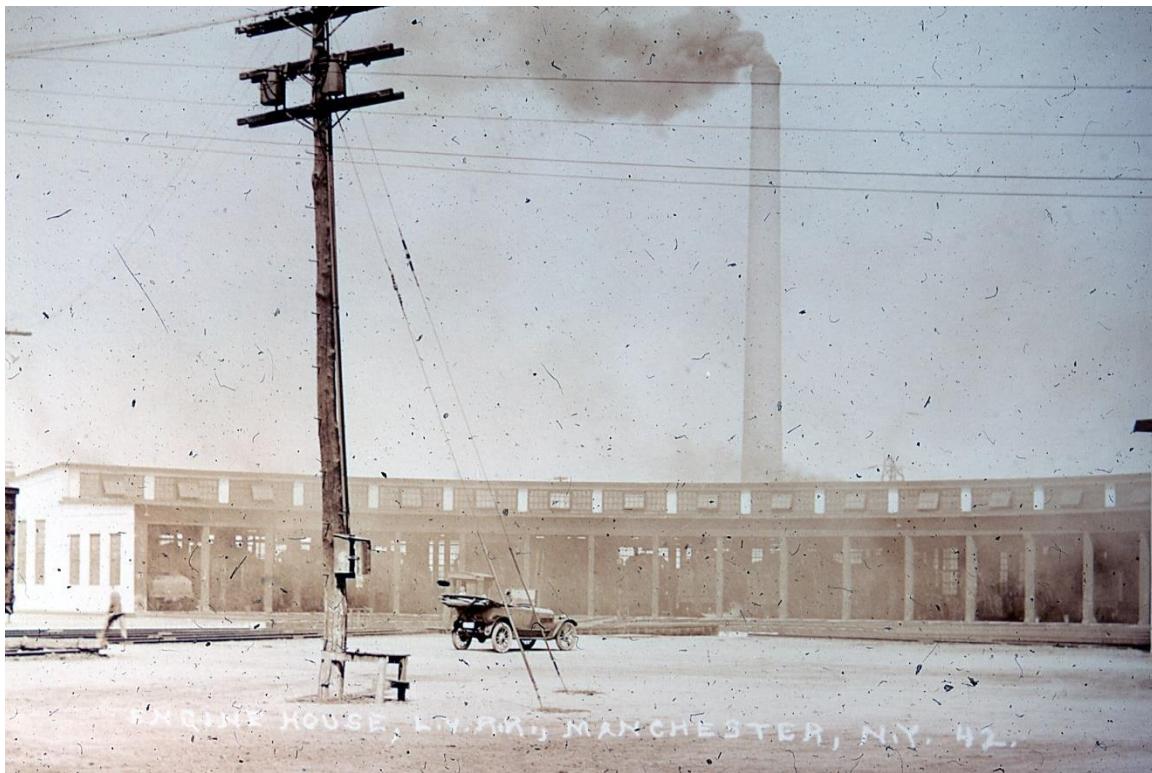
Aerial View Photograph of LVRR Manchester Yard Circa 1950

The Lehigh Valley Railroad in Manchester, New York

by Richard Palmer

The coming of the Lehigh Valley Railroad brought great change to the village of Manchester in Ontario County when it was built between 1891 and 1892 from Sayre, Pennsylvania, to Buffalo, New York. The railroad company, which for many years had gained access to Buffalo via the Erie Railroad, decided it was time to extend its mainline northwesterly to Geneva and straight west to Buffalo. This was the last major railroad to be built through this region.

Manchester quickly became a division point on the Lehigh Valley as traditionally engine crews only ran 100 miles. This place was about halfway between Sayre and Buffalo. A large freight yard and locomotive servicing facilities were constructed by the Lehigh Valley in Manchester. Two new 100,000-gallon capacity steel water tanks were installed in 1912. A new 30-bay roundhouse with a 100-foot long turntable was built in 1916. A new steam locomotive coaling station was built in 1918.



LVRR Manchester Roundhouse Postcard

The Manchester yard was once recognized as the largest in the world. During the peak years, more than 900 employees worked in and from the yard; a full force of engineers, conductors, firemen, brakemen, switchmen, hostlers, helpers, pipe fitters, blacksmiths, electricians, machinists, and tower men. Swift and Co. had a large facility here to ice cars carrying perishables.

The Manchester freight transfer facility was built in 1913 to transfer and expedite less than carload (LCL) shipments. The "Lehigh Transfer" was one of the largest operations in the world. Records indicated that it loaded and unloaded more than one hundred freight cars a day. After years of freight traffic inroads by trucks, the facility closed in 1959.



LVRR Manchester Transfer Station Postcard

The worst train wreck ever to occur here was on August 25, 1911, in which 29 passengers were killed and 62 were injured. Train No. 4, the Chicago, New York, and Washington Express, was due at Manchester at 12:02 p.m. The train was running late and reached the bridge 50 feet over the Canandaigua Outlet at 12:48 p.m. when it struck a broken rail. The train consisted of 14 cars. As the sixth car, a diner, passed over, the train derailed. The car rolled down the embankment and lodged against a telegraph pole. The seventh car, the Philadelphia coach, left the bridge, crashing into the stream, coming to rest on one side. Most of the dead were taken from this car. The eighth car, a Pullman sleeping car, plunged into the stream. It remained upright, the rear end resting on the bridge. Eleven of the injured were rushed to Clifton Springs Sanitarium, nine to Canandaigua Hospital, and 45 to Rochester. It was nearly a week before all the dead were identified.

For many years, the Main Street railroad crossing proved to be a problem. A train consisting of 100 cars could clear Connelly crossing but it was impossible to break the train at the Main Street crossing, particularly during the winter. This served as a great inconvenience, especially in emergencies. Finally, an underpass was constructed in 1932 which a few years ago was eliminated and returned to being a grade crossing.

During both world wars, the Lehigh Valley carried servicemen. Local people learned to recognize the whistles of troop trains as they entered the yards. The Red Cross would be at the station to hand out lunches to the servicemen.

The first passenger train stopped in Manchester on September 1, 1892. The depot was located at the east end of the yard. Passenger trains no longer stopped here after February 2, 1935. Thereafter, the stop for Manchester was Clifton Springs. The famous Black Diamond passenger train, which was inaugurated on May 18, 1896, made its last run on May 11, 1959. The last passenger train on the Lehigh Valley, the Maple Leaf, passed through Manchester on a snowy February 3, 1961.



LVRR Manchester Depot Postcard

Cutbacks at Manchester yard began in earnest in the mid-1960s. By the end of 1972, it was a thing of the past as far as Manchester was concerned. It officially ended on October 30 as part of a seemingly endless series of economy moves. Train crews would no longer stop here as had been done for generations. The days of layovers were now a thing of the past.

The old bunkhouse in Manchester, which has been the home away from home for thousands of railroad men, also ceased operation. Next to the bunkhouse was the "Lehigh Restaurant" which served meals to Lehigh Valley employees at all hours. The food was good and the restaurant was clean. Both buildings were eventually demolished. The yard office, which had been witness to the rapid disintegration of a once vast railroad system, was closed and destroyed by a fire.



LVRR Manchester Tower and Bunkhouse Photograph

All communication would now be directed to the crew dispatcher in Buffalo for the one local run which worked five days a week from Manchester to the Rochester area. The trainmaster in Geneva now had jurisdiction of the very few Manchester crewmen and maintenance men left in the area. Several months earlier, men with seniority rights had to leave here and work out of Buffalo. Those with fewer years on the railroad had to try and find work elsewhere.

The shut down had been talked about for months before it became fact. Some time before, on July 1, 1970, yard jobs at Manchester were eliminated. Manchester at first gradually and then very abruptly became nothing except a layover stop and now that was coming to an end. Now, the entire westbound yard tracks were gone. For a time, 22 eastbound tracks were left to rust and weeds within the immediate yard; only three tracks remained in use. The yard became ghosts of the past that only the older men remembered. The only remnants of this once busy railroad yard are the derelict roundhouse and oil house.

The only job left here was the Rochester local, which picked up cars at Manchester and at Rochester Junction left by main line trains. There they were sorted out, some going to the Lima branch and some to Henrietta and Rochester. There were seven crewmen on this job and they did both yard and road work, switching in Manchester and at all other points. They serviced the gas works in Manchester and then went on to Victor Lumber Co. and served Mendon Farm Machinery Co. Also, since the Penn Central Railroad had recently closed its Holcomb branch line, Agway used the Lehigh Valley in Victor.

The Rochester local also serviced Ryan Homes in East Victor and a few customers to the west of Victor including Iron City. In Henrietta, the Lehigh Valley serviced Matthews and Fields Lumber Co. and also one oil and one tallow company; then on to Mount Hope Avenue where coal was delivered to the University of Rochester. A connection with the Erie Lackawanna Railroad was made in Rochester. The Lehigh Valley yard in Rochester was sold to make way for urban renewal. When that occurred, the remaining four tracks in Rochester were removed.

In Geneva, the Lehigh Valley yard still had two jobs - one which serviced industry there - and then on to Rushville on the rickety Naples branch during the day. A spur from the mainline served the Seneca Army Depot. The other branch job (or local) went from Geneva to Auburn, called the Auburn Branch Connection.

In Manchester, one could see many old derelict box cars and low sided gondolas sitting on the sidings. They were known as bad order cars. They were eventually sold to a firm in Indiana which rehabilitated them and then they were leased back to the railroad.

The westbound side of the yard tracks were removed about 1973-1974. Yard lights remained illuminated well into the early 1970s. About 1,500 bad order cars were stored on the eastbound side as the 1970s progressed. These were all removed before Conrail. Some were in too rough a shape to move over the road and were scrapped at the former LCL docks. The last train of bad order cars were pulled east on March 21, 1976, and the Lehigh Valley closed down completely on April 1.



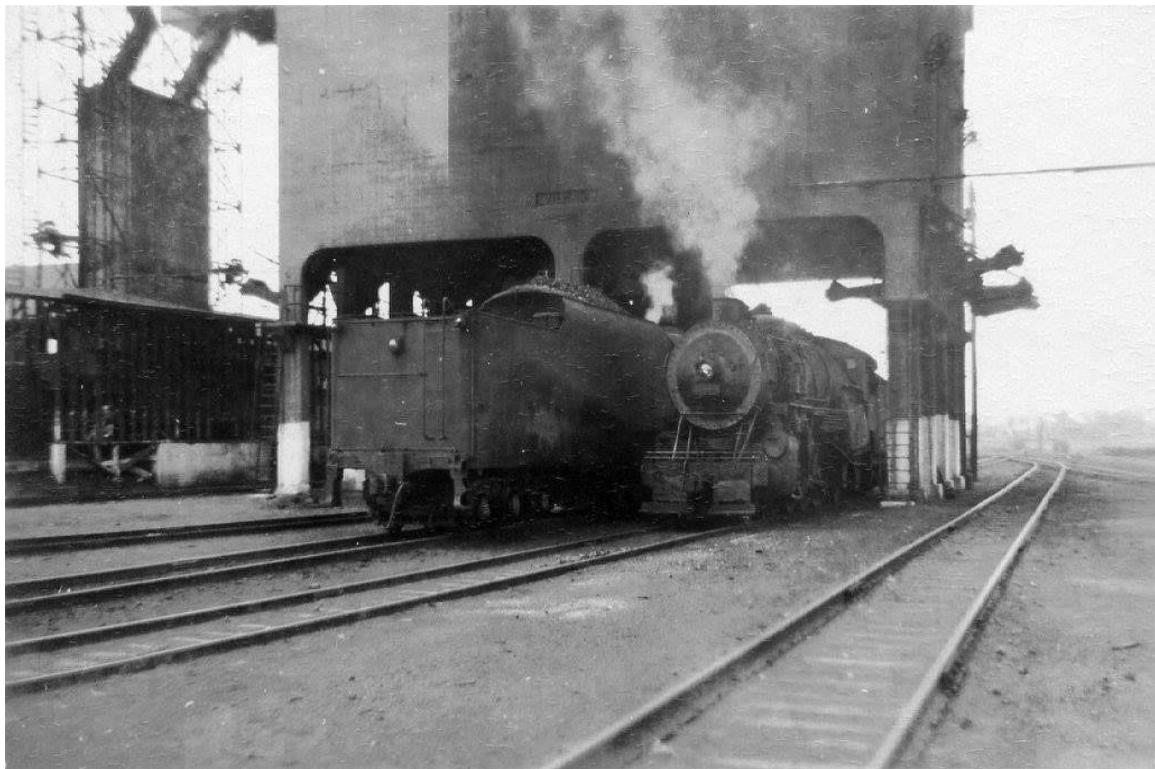
LVRR Extra 412 Eastbound Leaving Manchester on March 30, 1976 (Paul Templeton Photograph)

Long in bankruptcy, the end of the Lehigh Valley Railroad took place at midnight on April 1, 1976. The last two Lehigh Valley trains passed through Manchester on the evening of March 31. The last westbound train, with Engineer Pat Petrone of Manchester, passed through at 8 p.m. The last train through Manchester was an eastbound train passing through at 11 p.m., with George Dressler as engineer and Fred "Soot" Record of Manchester as fireman. Deferring to his local roots, Record was allowed to operate the last Lehigh Valley train through Manchester.

Conrail was formed in 1976 to reorganize and revitalize seven bankrupt railroads in the Northeast. Except for short segments, the Lehigh Valley mainline was dismantled between Van Etten and Buffalo over the next several years. Much of the right of way is now a bike/hiking trail.

A portion of the mainline was kept intact between Geneva and Victor for about two years when a new connection was built with the Auburn Road just east of Manchester. Then the mainline was dismantled between there and Geneva. Conrail continued to operate the Auburn Road line until it was taken over by the Finger Lakes Railway in 1995.

In 1979, the Ontario Central Railroad took over operation of 13 miles of the former Lehigh Valley mainline between Manchester and Victor to serve Victor Insulator Co. and a few other remaining customers. Ontario Central, owned by the Livonia, Avon & Lakeville Railroad, was sold to the Finger Lakes Railway in 2007. The line is now out of service.



LVRR Manchester Coaling Station Photograph