

The Railroad Experience in the Western Reserve

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“The Railroad Experience in the Western Reserve” will explore several topics. Coverage of the “Demonstration Period” of the 1830’s and 1840’s will focus on one of the nation’s most unusual pioneer projects, the ill-fated Ohio Rail Road, a carrier designed to be built on wooden “stilts” along the south shore of Lake Erie. The era of post-Civil War “system building” will cover the growth and development of major regional and inter-regional systems, including the Baltimore & Ohio, Erie, New York Central and Pennsylvania railroads. Also to be reviewed will be the narrow-gauge craze that burst upon the area in the 1870’s and 1880’s. A brief summary of the “interurban era” of the early 20th century will be discussed in the context of the area’s mature steam railroad network. Then special attention will be given to the Cleveland-based Allegheny Corporation, the creation of the “Vans,” O.P. and M.J. Van Sweringen, during the 1920’s and 1930’s. Discussion will follow on the area’s tie-in to the “merger madness” of the 1960’s, particularly the saga of the Erie Lackawanna Railroad, and subsequent creation of mega rail corporations. Finally, the social dimensions of railroads in the Western Reserve will be reviewed; how did the iron horse affect residents over the course of more than 150 years?