

## Being Part of the Solution

by Nancy Allinger

The arrival of spring redirects our attention to the outdoors. Windows broadcast nature shows, as we watch the evening hunt of a fox, circling hawks, nesting songbirds, scurrying mice and budding trees and flowers. Bicycles are pulled out of garages and hiking boots are laced up as we venture out into the glorious green spaces of our neighborhood and get reacquainted with the beauty and tranquillity of the countryside. Spring reminds us, the residents of Mendon and Rush, of how comfortably we sit in the lap of mother nature.

However, alarming development trends and diminishing farmlands threaten to wrench us away from the embrace of our natural surroundings. According to the Monroe County Farmland Protection Plan, 5,787 acres of land in Rush and 6,570 acres of land in Mendon are currently "at-risk" of development.

Governments at all levels are developing plans to protect open space, but their work is slow and often marred with politics. Meanwhile, paradise is being paved.

However, residents of Rush and Mendon need not despair, we need only to act. We can start by giving land donations and easements, monetary contributions and volunteer time to our local land trust, the Mendon Foundation.

### Losing Ground

Four decades of sprawling development in Monroe County has exerted tremendous pressure on the area's open space as developers convert prime agricultural space into housing tracts or commercial strips. Last year, six new subdivisions and ten individual homes were approved for construction in Mendon.

Loss of open space is a serious financial problem for area towns. A typical suburban residence uses \$1.50 in public services for every \$1 paid in taxes. However, as Donella Meadows, a professor of environmental studies at Dartmouth College notes, "Studies from all over show that open land pays far more — often twice as much — in property taxes than it costs in services. Cows don't put their kids in school; trees don't put potholes in the roads. Open land absorbs floods, recharges aquifers, cleans the air, harbors wildlife, and measurably increases the value of property nearby."

Unfortunately open space, especially farmland, is disappearing. The County Farmland Protection Plan states that "total farm acreage, harvested cropland, number of farms and persons whose principal occupation is farming have declined." The American Farmland Trust says that the Rochester-Finger Lakes region ranks 11th among the 20 most threatened agricultural regions in the United States.

### Gaining Ground

We, the residents of Rush and Mendon have time to preserve the beautiful rural character of our towns, but not much. We are fortunate that so many woods, streams and wildflower fields still remain. However, we need to act now if we want them to be there for our children and grandchildren

As a land trust, the Mendon Foundation facilitates the preservation of land. Landowners can donate property to the Foundation that they would like to have remain forever wild. In return, the owner is able to deduct the value of the donation for tax purposes.

A landowner can also grant an easement to the Foundation. An easement allows the land to remain in possession of the owner with the understanding that it will remain undeveloped. An easement lowers the value of a piece of land. The landowner can take the loss of value as a tax deduction. The tax assessment on the property should also drop as the value of the land drops.

Donations of land and easements are direct and immediate ways to protect the open space in our neighborhoods. Money and volunteer time help support the Foundation's other efforts to save undeveloped land.

### Give thanks by giving

As spring eases into summer, gardens burst with color, corn fields reach for the sky and decades old trees provide relief from the heat of the day. Mother nature nourishes us with her finest fare. Now, as her grateful children, we can thank her by protecting her. Help the Mendon Foundation save the very land that sustains us. Your donations will preserve the pastoral setting of our home sweet home.

*Nancy Allinger is a freelance writer who specializes in environmental and development issues.*





## Mendon Foundation Newsletter

The Mendon Foundation is a completely volunteer organization which exists with the generous support of its members, volunteers and contributors.

Our newsletter is published three times per year.

You can contact us with ideas and suggestions for our newsletter, requests for advertising, to join The Foundation, offers of volunteerism, contributions or any question at:

P.O. Box 231, Mendon, N.Y. 14506-023 or call any board member listed below.

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## The Lehigh Valley Railroad The Final Years

*By Mary Hamilton-Dann*

At midnight March 31 / April 1, 1976, freight operations in the eastern United States were taken over by Consolidated Rail Corporation (CONRAIL). This government mandated change had been preceded in 1970 by a similar move in which passenger service became a public utility (AMTRAK).

While AMTRAK was underwritten by the Federal Government, CONRAIL was directed to be self-sustaining.

Thus ended the 150-year 'Railroad Era' which had converted an agrarian society of isolated communities to a unified whole. The institution of railroading was the primary factor in creating a United States of America.

Following the end of World War I, rapid changes in technology affected traditional ways of moving goods and people, with autos and trucks beginning to supplant the railroads.

But it was not until the conclusion of World War II that the industry faced an irreversible trend from rails to highways. The coup de grace was delivered by the airlines.

In the meantime, streamlining of engines and coaches, together with diesel power replacing steam, were costly experiments which failed to remedy the basic cause of the railroads' decline: unfair competition.

Whereas the railroads bore the entire expense of operation – labor contracts; ownership of land; building and maintaining right of way, rolling stock, depots; heavy taxation at every jurisdictional level – the country's highways and airports, including air-traffic control, were taxpayer funded.

(cont'd on page 5)

### • Mendon Foundation • Mission Statement

The Mendon Foundation is a non-profit corporation established to:

**PRESERVE**, protect and enhance the scenic, natural, recreational and structural resources in the Town of Mendon and directly adjacent properties,

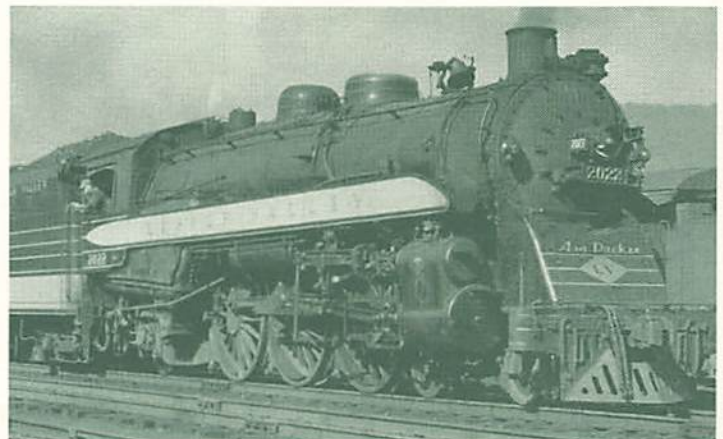
**MAINTAIN** a responsible stewardship of assets and properties held or controlled by the corporation,

**ESTABLISH** and promote local environmental education on issues pertinent to the preservation of natural resources in the Town of Mendon,

**ESTABLISH** and promote programs to monitor the natural resources in the Town of Mendon.

As we succeed in these objectives, we enhance property values for all Mendon property owners. The Foundation is supported by membership fees, grants and other contributions. Donations to the Mendon Foundation are tax deductible.

Proceeds are used to cover easement acquisitions, monitoring and communications.  
All labor is volunteer.



*Early example of LV 'Streamlining'*  
Photo courtesy of Chuck Youngkurth



# Wildlife Surviving Winter

By John Hauber

While we snuggle up to the fireplace, wood stove, or just nudge the thermostat and relax in the warmth of our homes, what does wildlife do to live through winter's cold and snow? Literally, survival is put to the critical test in winter for most species. Hypothermia will quickly take its toll on us unless we are able to dress for it and find adequate shelter.

Wildlife, too, would succumb except that nature makes preparations to accommodate them for winter. The most obvious and complete winter survival technique is hibernation. Actually very few species sleep through the winter. Bats, chipmunks, and woodchucks are true hibernators, while the black bear is close behind by bulking up on rich foods and sleeping through much of winter's cold. However, during warm spells and if disturbed, it is not unusual for the bear to become active for short periods.

Most other species still must contend day after day with all of life's necessities: food, shelter, and water. The worst of winter may send raccoons, skunks, opossum, turkeys and others into a sheltered spot, den or roost for extended periods. However, these animals do stay otherwise active throughout the winter. Turkeys have been known to stay on roost up to two weeks while severe storms and deep powder snows prevent foraging. While inactive, their weight loss was negligible.

Certainly another innovative technique is migration. The dramatic flights of Canada geese in spring and fall are sure sights of changing seasons. As well, the season differences in many song bird species suggest definite shifts. However, it is interesting to note that while most birds migrate, we still may have the same species here year round. While our summer robins head for warmer spots to the south, robins that nest in Ontario, Canada may spend winter here.

Other individual adaptations may be found. The weasel is common in our area although rarely seen. As winter comes on, its pelage (fura) undergoes a dramatic change from brown to white. It does keep the black tip to the tail. Obviously, white on white increases this predator's survival versus larger predators, and allows it to hunt its food while camouflaged against the snow. Snowshoe hare undergo a similar transformation although their habitat requirements are not found around here. Such pelagic changes can backfire during extended thaw periods. In areas further south with less consistent snows, these species stay brown year round.

One of my favorite experiences with wildlife in winter is being visited by a myriad of song birds while wait-

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## Wildlife Surviving Winter (cont'd from page 3)

ing on stand during deer season. Chickadees, brown creeper, downy woodpeckers, nuthatches, grey juncos, kinglets, and even robins and cardinals may come foraging though the woods and field edges. Through comfort in numbers or companionship, several different species often will move through together. Considering my success lately – or lack thereof – I wonder if hunting is just a valid excuse for my winter enjoyment with wildlife?

Winter encounters and observations of ruffed grouse can be exciting to say the least. More common in the Appalachian Plateau, grouse are still occasionally found through the Lake Plains. Many a winter hiker or cross country skier has been startled 'half to death' by the explosive flush of a grouse. Often they wait until the visitor has passed them or is directly under the tree where they were roosting. A couple winter adaptations for the grouse are that their feet develop scales and feathers so that they act as snowshoes to enhance walking over the snow. Also when deep powder snows are present, these birds may 'snow roost'. Rather than spending the night roosting in the trees subject to storms, cold and night predators, grouse at dusk will dive into the snow and be buried out of sight. The temperature in the snow is more moderate, there is no wind, and their insulating feathers keep them warm. A change in overnight conditions that creates a crust on the snow can however trap them there. Winter recreation enthusiasts can be richly surprised to have snow roosting grouse flush with an explosion of powder snow.

While winter is the most critical time for survival of most species, nature has created adaptations to see them through.

Layers of fat, thick innerfur, and extra down are obvious preparations. Migrations, deep sleeps and localized movements to take advantage of solar exposure, better feeds, less wind, and shallower snow also ease the consequences. These are only a few of the special adaptations, see what others come to your mind.

*John Hauber is a Department of Environmental Conservation Wildlife Officer.*

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*Contact The Mendon Foundation for details*

## Lehigh Valley Railroad (cont'd from page 2)

Lehigh Valley Railroad history during the years 1920 - 1976 reflected what was transpiring in the industry nationwide. Between the wars, prosperous lines such as the New York Central and the Pennsylvania began converting to diesel power and streamlining.

LV's initial 'streamlining' consisted of painted boards extending the length of steam engines. This was later followed by shrouding the entire steam engine except



*'Shrouded Steam Engine, 1940*  
Photo courtesy of Chuck Youngkurth

for the driving wheels. The sheet metal superstructure, which added tons of weight while offering no improvement in performance, was merely cosmetic.

The bottom line was a constraining factor for the Lehigh until profits from World War II made possible the acquisition of new engines. These blunt faced diesels were frequently teamed with older passenger coaches modified by skirting which concealed the trucks (wheel assemblies). New LV trainsets did not appear until after 1948.

But entirely new passenger trains, similar to those run by the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western RR, were rare on the Lehigh where style was generally limited to multi-unit diesel engines.

On the other hand, incongruity between shiny new diesels and a drag of older freight cars could not have



been remedied by the Lehigh or any other railroad. All lines carried the freight cars of other lines in addition to their own, and freight cars were built to last. Shippers, unlike passengers, cared nothing about aesthetics.

User-revenue depended upon the quality of a railroad's physical plant hence efficiency of service. Since railroad industry leaders set the pace for innovation and style, less affluent roads such as the Lehigh were obliged to follow their lead in order to maintain a competitive edge.

The above was contingent upon the availability of loans – either directly from banks or by issuing stock. However, stock offerings opened the way for one railroad to gain control of another by purchasing a majority of the latter's holdings.

This is what happened to the Lehigh. Having survived similar crises in the past, particularly one involving the Reading RR, it finally succumbed to the Pennsylvania Railroad which had acquired almost 90% of LV  
(cont'd on page 6)

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## Lehigh Valley Railroad (cont'd from page 5)

securities. The PRR now owned the Lehigh Valley which was permitted to run at the will of Pennsy's Board of Directors; in effect, it was the PRR's bargaining chip. The Pennsy could trade it, sell it, or discontinue it altogether.

But the Pennsylvania RR was itself in financial difficulty. After a fruitless union with the ailing New York Central (Penn Central) which lasted from 1968 to 1970, the combined roads declared bankruptcy, taking the Lehigh with them.

It was the largest single bankruptcy in U.S. history.

After 1976, the State of New York became owner of ex-Lehigh property on the Seneca and Buffalo Divisions (Sayre/Geneva, Geneva/Buffalo). In order to divest itself of unwanted and untaxable real estate, the State Legislature offered it for sale to interested parties: private, corporate or local jurisdictional, i.e. county, township, etc. Of the latter, only Monroe County accepted the offer.

A section of the LV mainline from west Victor to east Shortsville was purchased by the Ontario Central RR. Also remaining active was a portion of the Rochester

Branch from Henrietta to the City. On the ex-Lehigh's Seneca Division, Conrail took over the line from Sayre through Van Etten and Ithaca to Ludlowville. But westward from the Genesee River, the old Lehigh roadbed is now barely visible among the weeds and overgrowth in Livingston, Genesee and Erie Counties.

The most salvageable property of an abandoned railroad was its steel tracks. When the United States Railway Association declared the Lehigh's Seneca and Buffalo Division trackage to be redundant and therefore expendable, rails were torn up and sold or recycled.

That many Lehigh bridges did not undergo a similar fate resulted from the negative economics of demolition; the job was too costly. Those same bridges have become valuable to The Mendon Foundation as it restores for recreational use the Lehigh road bed in Monroe County.

Notwithstanding the ignominious end for Asa Packer's railroad, it bequeathed a legacy which survives today. Lehigh RR historians, together with railroad historical societies and model railroaders, are keeping alive the story of a road that continues to fascinate people many of whom never traveled on the Lehigh Valley Railroad.

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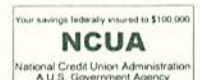
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## So Much More Than Just Tracks

The Lehigh Valley Railroad, or at least its right of ways and history plays an important role in our community through the development of the Lehigh Valley Trail. We often think of this as land or the mechanical history of the railroads but the history is also rich in the history of the people who build and operated the railroad.

Following is a tribute to Eugene Spencer, reprinted with permission of the author, Paul S. Worboys.

It was with sadness that I found the obituary of Eugene Spencer in the March 13 D&C. While not a resident of *The Sentinel's* coverage area, this late Conesus resident should go in our area's historical annals for the job he help as a station agent for the departed Lehigh Valley Railroad; not for being one of the hundreds of agents who served the Lehigh during its long existence, but for being the last (at least in our area).

As the Lehigh Valley Railroad was wasting into oblivion during the 1960's and 70's, Eugene took the final assignments at agency stations in Hemlock (closed in 1968), Henrietta, Victor and Honeoye Falls (closed in 1969), Rochester (1973), and Lima (which survived until Conrail took over in 1976).

Ever the magician, he operated several depots at the same time. Using a staggered schedule, "Spence" opened in Lima, ate lunch in Honeoye Falls and put the LV to bed over in Victor. The next day, the rare customer had to carefully consider the time, for the depot man was either in Hemlock, or Henrietta or even in Rochester – providing his auto transport (the bane of the passenger trains of old) remained dependable.

Thanks to the words, "Tell 'em 'Spence' says it's ok", my very fortunate little brother, presently 6'3" and no longer appreciative of the nickname "Flip", bummed a caboose ride all the way to Hemlock one spring day. Years later I sat in Gene's rural home as he regaled me with railroading stories and displayed the fragments of a wholesome career from yesteryear.

Over the sofa was hung a large painting by a young woman who appreciated the value of a way of life, soon to disappear. With palette and brush, she recorded it for Gene Spencer. It depicts the place where his fascinating career took root as a night operator of a lonely country junction, where a single track linking Hemlock Lake with Rochester bisected the main line rails of the Lehigh Valley between bustling New York City and brawny Buffalo.

The rendition depicts a steam train passing the fanciful Victorian depot at Rochester Junction. This railroad location (1892-1976) and Eugene Spencer, the railroad man, left this world at the very same age of 84. I mourn the passing of both of them.

*Paul S. Worboys, Honeoye Falls*

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