

Representations of RAILROADING

Scott LOTHES

CENTER FOR RAILROAD
PHOTOGRAPHY & ART

Sandhouse Rail Group
Northwestern University
September 15, 2016

Good afternoon. Thank you, Norm, for the introduction, and for the invitation to speak here today. As Norm mentioned, he serves on the board of my organization, the Center for Railroad Photography & Art, where he holds the particularly thankless role of chair of our audit committee. I am Scott Lothes, president and executive director of the Center, and I came into that role knowing a good bit about railroads and photography, but not as much about running a nonprofit. Let me tell you, I have quickly learned that even a small organization like ours has to do a remarkable amount of paperwork just to maintain our legal existence each year. Would that every nonprofit had someone of Norm's caliber serving on their board and chairing their audit committee. You already know what an incredible person Norm is, but it's worth saying again. Thank you, Norm.

Thanks also to Diana Marek for her incredible work in organizing these events. That's another thankless role, but Diana makes it look easy. And I also hear it's her birthday today!

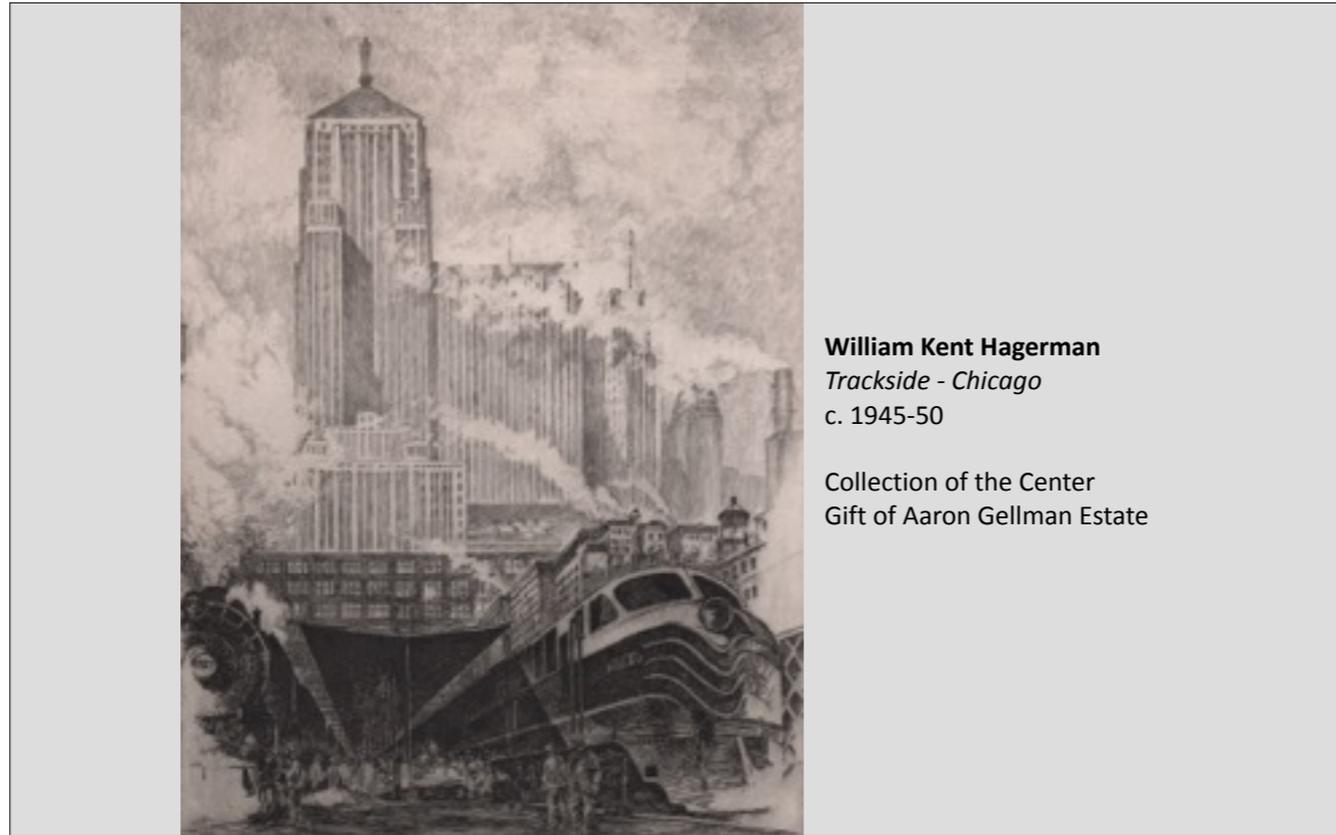
And thank you for being here!



The reason Norm invited me to this particular session was in large part because of this man, the late Professor Aaron Gellman. I am privileged to have known Prof. Gellman, and I think this photograph by George Hamlin, a former student and Center member, really portrays Aaron the way I remember him.

The Center holds a conference each spring called “Conversations,” just down the road at Lake Forest College. It’s a three-day symposium about railroad photography and art, and Aaron attended faithfully for the last several years of his life. For someone who made his mark—and a great mark—as an expert on the business of transportation, it might come as a surprise that he was also so devoted to the art of transportation.

So much so, I should add, that he left a bequest to the Center of \$25,000—which he had never mentioned to any of us during the course of his life. Thank you, Aaron.



William Kent Hagerman

Trackside - Chicago

c. 1945-50

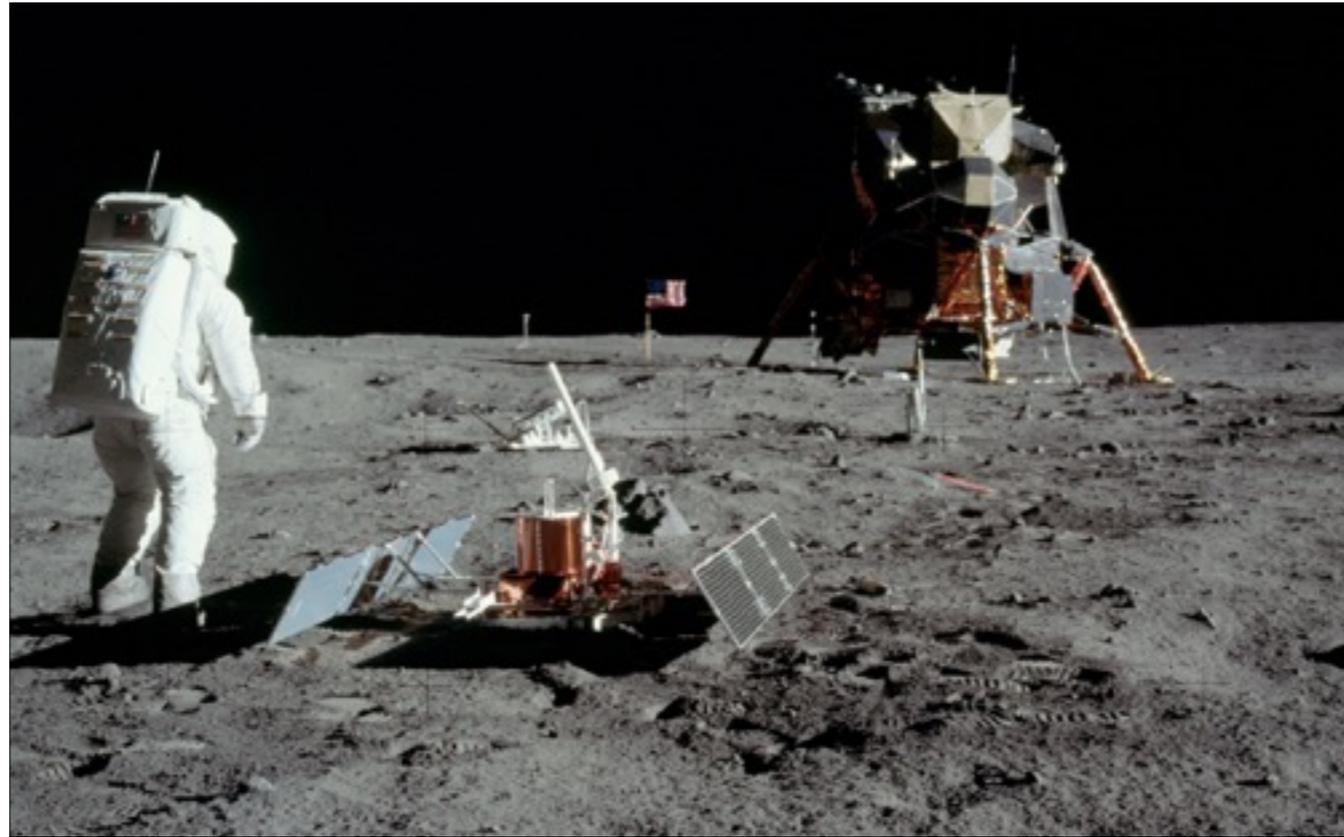
Collection of the Center

Gift of Aaron Gellman Estate

He even amassed a small art collection of his own, part of which now belongs to the Center.

If we could ask him today, I think Prof. Gellman would tell us that the business and the art of transportation are two sides of the same coin. Business, when it succeeds, figures out how to make transportation work—how to make it work more economically, efficiently, and safely. Art, when it succeeds, takes a step back, and tells us what transportation really means. Aaron clearly understood the business of transportation, and he also understood very well what it meant to the world.

Transportation has taken us across continents, across oceans...



...and all the way to the moon.

And I'd like to share a quote from a *New York Times* book reviewer, who wrote:

“The day of the first moonwalk, my father's college literature professor told his class, ‘Someday they'll send a poet, and we'll find out what it's really like.’”

That, I think, is what art aspires to. I want to talk about art and railroading today. To do that, we need to come back from the moon, and go back to 1829...



Clyde O. DeLand
*The First
Locomotive*
c. 1916

Library of Congress

When the Stourbridge Lion, the first steam locomotive to operate in the United States, arrived in New York Harbor. Like a child's Christmas toy, it came with "some assembly required."

That took place out-of-doors, at the West Point Foundry Association, under the direction of a man named David Matthew, who wrote that the locomotive, "became the object of curiosity to thousands who visited the works from day to day."

Can you imagine? Think of how a New Yorker of the early 19th century might have felt, upon seeing this seven-and-a-half-ton mass of metal being assembled and fired up for the first time. These early locomotives were rock stars of their day, in every bit the same way the Saturn V rockets were rock stars of the Apollo moon landings 140 years later.

And remember that 1829 is still ten years before the invention of commercially-viable photography, so if we want any idea of what this looked like, we have to rely on artists. This print by Clyde DeLand, which depicts the *Lion's* first trial run on August 8, 1829, was made almost 90 years after the fact. I don't know how accurate it is, but I do think it succeeds in portraying some of the excitement and energy of the day.



J.M.W. Turner
*Rain, Steam,
and Speed*
1844

National
Gallery
London

The aim of this painting, on the other hand, has nothing to do with detailed accuracy. This is *Rain, Steam, and Speed*, an 1844 masterpiece in oil, 4 feet wide, by the British artist J.M.W. Turner. We've hopped across the pond to England, cradle of the early railroads, and this is a scene of the Great Western Railway crossing the Thames.

The Great Western struck out to the west from London, and it was built for speed—straight, flat, and with a broad gauge of 7 feet. The locomotive here is a 2-2-2 of the Fire Fly class, and these were absolute engineering marvels of their day. Their two driving wheels stood 7 feet above the rail, and when they were introduced in 1840, they began pulling scheduled trains with *average* speeds of 50 mph. And if we know anything about passenger schedules, then we know that if the average speed was 50, they surely had to be hitting 60 or better at times.

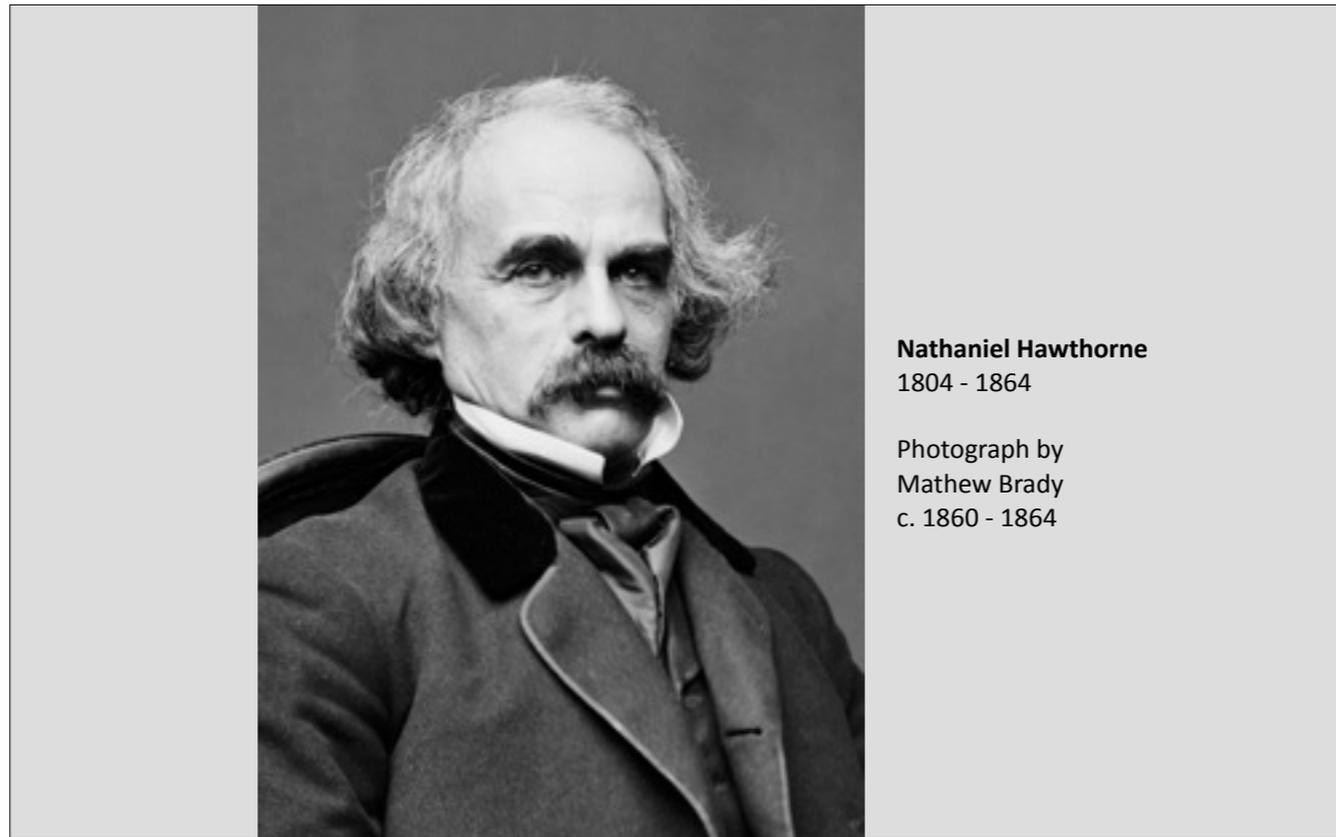
Think about that. For the entirety of human history up to that point, man had been able to travel no faster than a horse could run. And then, almost overnight, you could go a mile a minute. Journalists of the time struggled to write about this, for they simply did not have the language to convey that kind of speed. But Turner gives us a sense for what it was like, with this wonderfully evocative work.



And as a brief aside, it's worth noting that even today, almost two centuries later, the steam locomotive can still draw crowds to rival the *Stourbridge Lion's* first admirers in New York.

This is a John Gruber photograph showing Southern 4501's return to service in Tennessee in 2014. And of course, who needs artists today when everyone has high-definition cameras on their cellphones?

Spoiler alert: I think we do still need artists! And I think it's worth noting that even though the allure of the steam locomotive is still there, the emotions are very different. The sense of wonder endures, but the 1829 excitement for the new has turned completely around to a nostalgic longing for what once was. In the railroad we have the full arc of steam technology, and we've also had our first glimpse at the great pull of nostalgia. We'll come back to that, but not for a while.

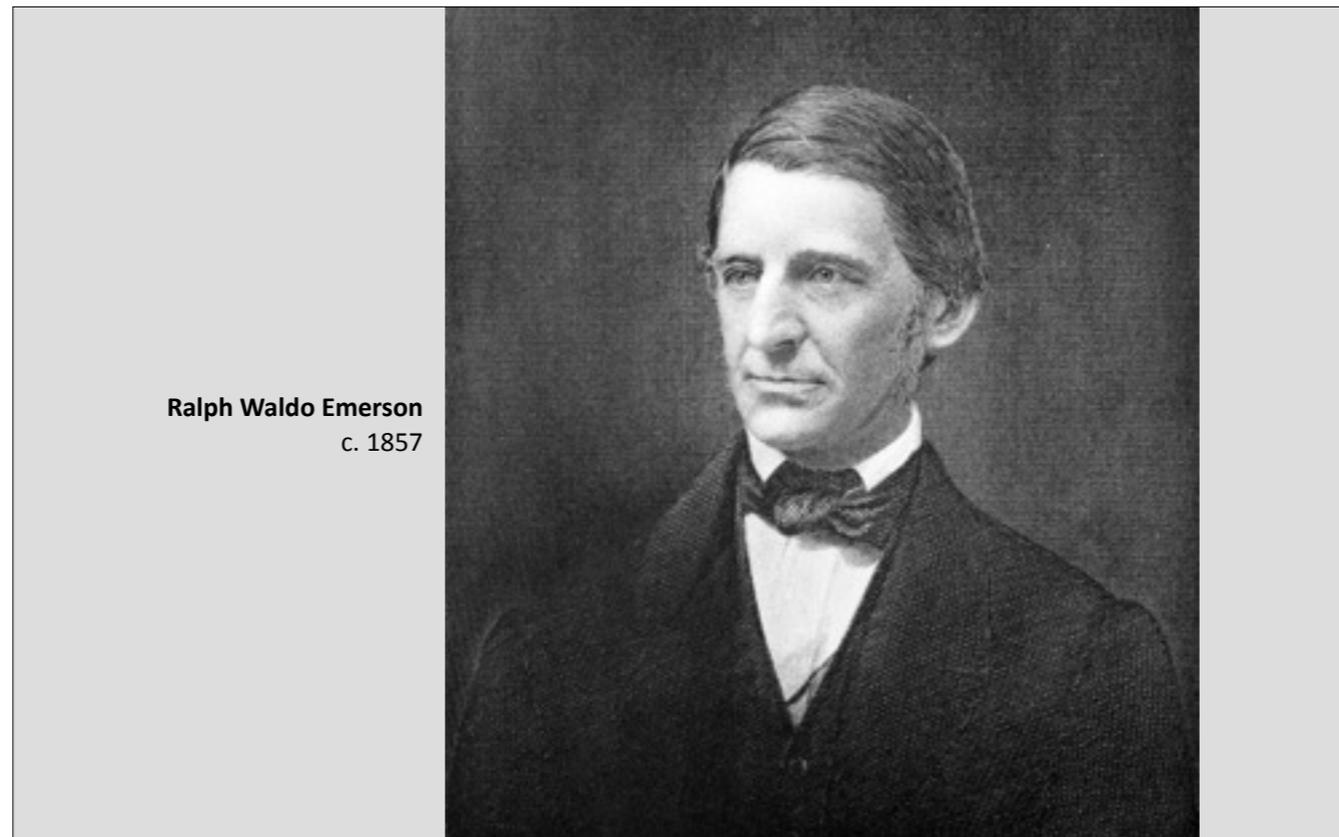


First, I want to return to the early 19th century, and see what some of our great writers had to say about the railroad.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts, and is best known for his novels like *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*. He also provided us with one of the first literary considerations of the railroad. One morning Hawthorne sat in a New England forest writing in his journal, at describing his tranquil setting in great detail.

But hark! there is the whistle of the locomotive – the long shriek, harsh, above all other harshness, for the space of a mile cannot mollify it into harmony. It tells a story of busy men, citizens, from the hot street, who have come to spend a day in the country village, men of business, in short of all unquietness; and no wonder that it gives such a startling shriek, since it brings the noisy world into the midst of our slumbrous peace.

Wait a minute! What did he say? “Harsh, above all other harshness”? I grew up loving trains, and the steam whistle is music to my ears. It’s difficult for me to relate to these words...but let’s keep going.



Ralph Waldo Emerson
c. 1857

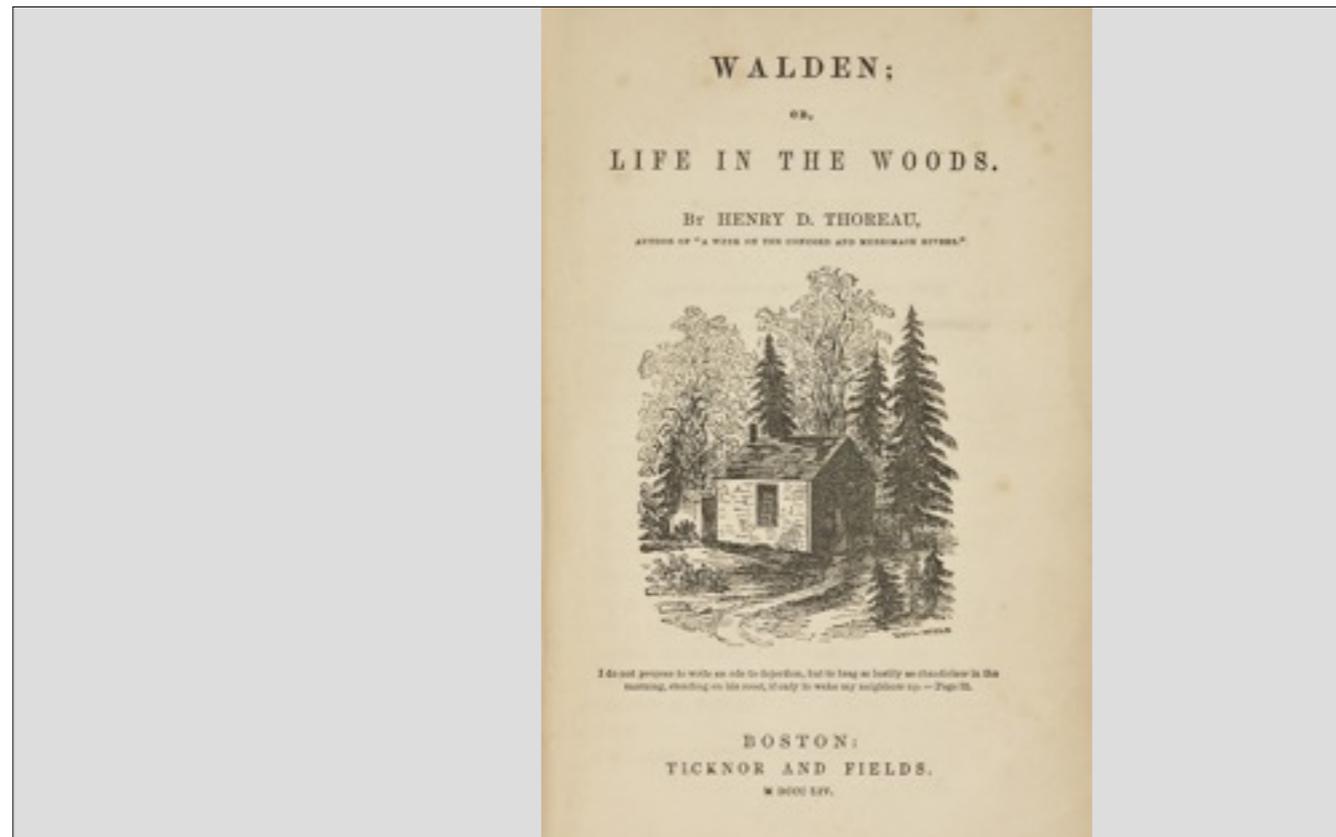
Hawthorne's contemporary, Ralph Waldo Emerson, was one of this country's greatest men of letters. Emerson also perceived what the new railroad would bring to the New England countryside. This journal entry of his, penned two years before Hawthorne's, was both less judgmental, and more visionary.

I hear the whistle of the locomotive in the woods. Wherever that music comes it has its sequel. It is the voice of the civility of the Nineteenth Century saying, "Here I am." It is interrogative: it is prophetic: and this Cassandra is believed: "Whew! Whew! Whew! How is real estate here in the swamp and wilderness? Ho for Boston! Whew! Whew! . . . I will plant a dozen houses on this pasture next moon, and a village anon. . . ."

Emerson writes with a driving force that echoes both the cadence of the locomotive, and the impending changes to the land. He went on to say that, "railroad iron is a magician's rod, in its power to evoke the sleeping energies of land and water." Neither Emerson nor Hawthorne questioned the tremendous potential of the railroad, but they did wonder about the effects of the changes it would bring.



And that takes to Henry David Thoreau. Today he is considered the father of environmental writing, and his book *Walden* is its Bible. Thoreau lived in a log cabin on Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts for two years—right after the Fitchburg Railroad completed its main line along the far side of the pond. You might expect Thoreau to build on the responses of his mentors, Emerson and Hawthorne, and to lash out even more strongly against the encroaching railroads and their shrieking trains. Perhaps, then, you will be as surprised as I was by what he had to say:



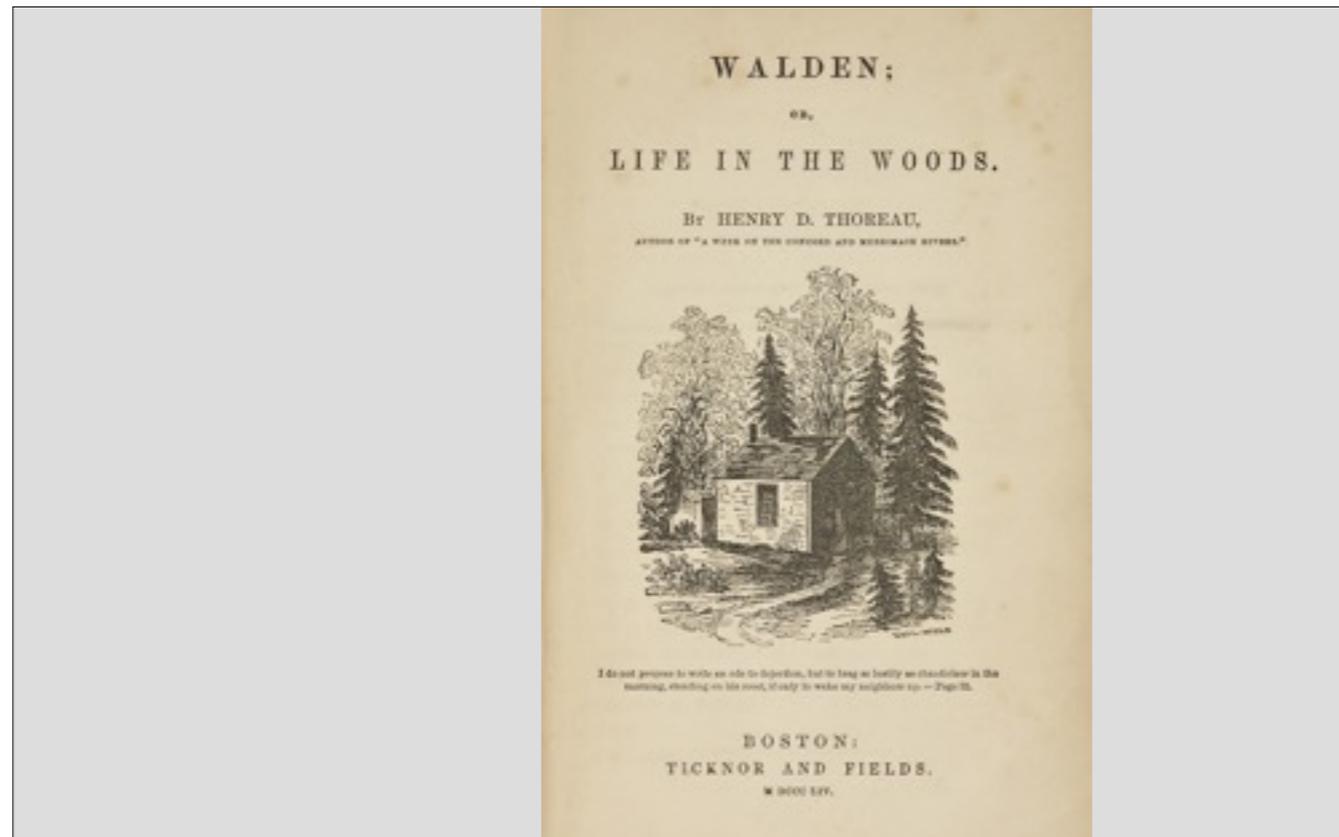
...when I hear the iron horse make the hills echo with his snort like thunder, shaking the earth with his feet, and breathing fire and smoke from his nostrils...it seems as if the earth had got a race now worthy to inhabit it.

[dramatic pause]

So one of the country's first environmentalists was also one of our first railroad enthusiasts!

But Thoreau was not finished. What he wrote was that it "*seems* as if the earth had got a race now worthy to inhabit it." Thoreau did not criticize the railroad, but he did go on to criticize the intentions of its builders. And whether we agree with his criticisms or not, for me, the takeaway is that, as I study and even celebrate the railroad—or any form of technology—I also need to step back sometimes, and consider how it's being used.

I think that's one of the great lessons that art can teach us, and as we begin to work our way through more than a century and a half of art and the railroad, we should step back again, briefly, and consider the literal "state of the art" of the early 19th century.



Hawthorne, Emerson, and Thoreau were among the first group of writers to develop a distinctly American voice. The nation was still young, the British Empire was still large, and European notions of art and culture still prevailed. Those notions set down some pretty clear ideas about what subject matter was acceptable for artists—and new technology was not on the list. The great painters of that age had been trained in figural, landscape, and genre work. The majority of the world's population still lived in the country, not the city. Painting a product of industry like a factory or a locomotive was simply not something a proper artist would do.

Yet, as we've already seen in literature, the railroad was such a force of nature that it practically demanded artistic consideration. And as we look at some of these early railroad paintings, keep in mind that the civilized world was grappling with the sweeping changes of the industrial revolution, while artists were grappling first with whether to even approach industrial subjects, and then with how to actually go about painting them. So it shouldn't be surprising that, when the railroad does begin to appear in art, it first appears largely in the background.



**Arthur
Fitzwilliam
Tait**
*A View on the
London to
Birmingham
Line*
1849

Collection of
Peter Mosse

This is the first of many paintings I'll be showing from the collection of Peter Mosse, a member of the Center who lives in New York and has one of the most extensive collections of railroad art in the country, if not the world. In 2015, Peter presented at our conference in Lake Forest and then wrote an extensive article for our journal, *Railroad Heritage*. (Hold it up.) My remarks on paintings from his collection are largely based on what he had to say about them.

This 2-by-3-foot oil painting by Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait shows the Dutton Viaduct on England's London to Birmingham line. It's very much in the style of the pictorial landscape paintings of the era, with the pastoral scene of cattle at the edge of the stream dominating the foreground. The viaduct is in the distance, and the train itself is tiny. But it's interesting to me that the railway, the new form of transportation, is in the sunlight, while barely visible at far left is the old way, the footpath, in deep shadow—almost an afterthought.

Incidentally, Peter recently visited this site, and he reported that the viaduct has been darkened by decades of pollution and now disfigured by catenary, yet the foreground remains largely unchanged.



Asher B. Durand, *Progress*, 1853. The Warner Collection, Gulf States Paper Corporation, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

If we look at one of the most famous examples from American art, we see similar themes.

This is *Progress* by Asher B. Durand, a mammoth six-foot-wide oil painting on the theme of manifest destiny. The train is even smaller here, crossing a low trestle way down at right. Squint and you might see the steam. But as with Tait's work, the railroad and all of the instruments of American progress are in the sunlight, while the Natives watch from the shadows at left.



Thomas Cole
The Oxbow
1836

Metropolitan
Museum of Art

Durand was part of a group of painters known as the “Hudson River School,” the first distinctly American art movement, founded by Thomas Cole. The Hudson River painters drew from Romanticism, but there are some key differences. The Romantics were largely reacting against the Industrial Revolution, and they tended to glorify the past. The Hudson River School was more embracing of change, and while they certainly glorified the dramatic landscapes of New England, they also sought to reconcile the march of industrial progress. Their work often shows harmony between nature and technology.



George Inness
The Lackawanna
Valley, c. 1856

National
Gallery of Art

The most famous—and most important—nineteenth century American painting of the railroad is this one:

The Lackawanna Valley, by George Inness

This was a commission by the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad. We often think of corporate art as containing elements of propaganda or at least clear biases, but today *The Lackawanna Valley* is the most critically-acclaimed railroad painting of the 19th century. We see many elements of the Hudson River School—warm light, pastoral landscape, reclining figure in the foreground. But here the train is larger, more prominent, and the view includes much more of the railroad, particularly the roundhouse, rising like a cathedral in the distance. And look at the foreground—it's littered with stumps, looking more like a recent battlefield than a harmonious blending of nature and technology. Ian Kennedy, former director of the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City, wrote that Inness “could not conceal his unease at the price of material progress and the spoliation of nature by a new technological system.”



Jasper Francis Cropsey, *Starrucca Viaduct, Pennsylvania*, 1865, Toledo Museum of Art

One more from this period, and my personal favorite, Jasper Francis Cropsey's *Starrucca Viaduct*, which opened on the New York and Erie Railroad at Lanesboro, Pennsylvania, in 1848. Compared to *The Lackawanna Valley*, this painting presents a more typically-harmonious view of the railroad in the landscape, but there are some key differences that make it stand out. Most paintings from the Hudson River School are set in the spring, in the morning, signifying the dawning of a new age. Here, it is autumn. The view looks south, so the light coming in from the right shows that it's afternoon. Not only that, but dark clouds are rolling in from the west. All this portends not so much to the beginning of something, but to its end.



Thomas Cole, *The Departure*, 1837, The Corcoran Gallery of Art

We'll come back to this, but let's look quickly at two more paintings by Thomas Cole. They comprise a narrative series, which was popular at the time. The first one, called *The Departure*, shows a great warrior confidently setting out from his castle, accompanied by his knights and attendants, on horses with heads held high. It is springtime, in the morning, and spirits are high.



Thomas Cole, *The Return*, 1837, The Corcoran Gallery of Art

This is the second painting, called *The Return*. Here it is autumn, the sun is setting, and attendants carry the ailing warrior to a church, while his steed follows behind, head down. The campaign did not go well, and what was beginning in the previous painting is ending in this one.



I see a lot of parallels in Cropsey's *Starrucca Viaduct*—the ending to the beginning depicted by so many other Hudson River Painters. Multiple art critics have compared it to classical European paintings showing remnants of the Roman Empire. To me, Cropsey alludes to a preemptive nostalgia, with the prescient implication that the Age of Steam will both rise and fall.



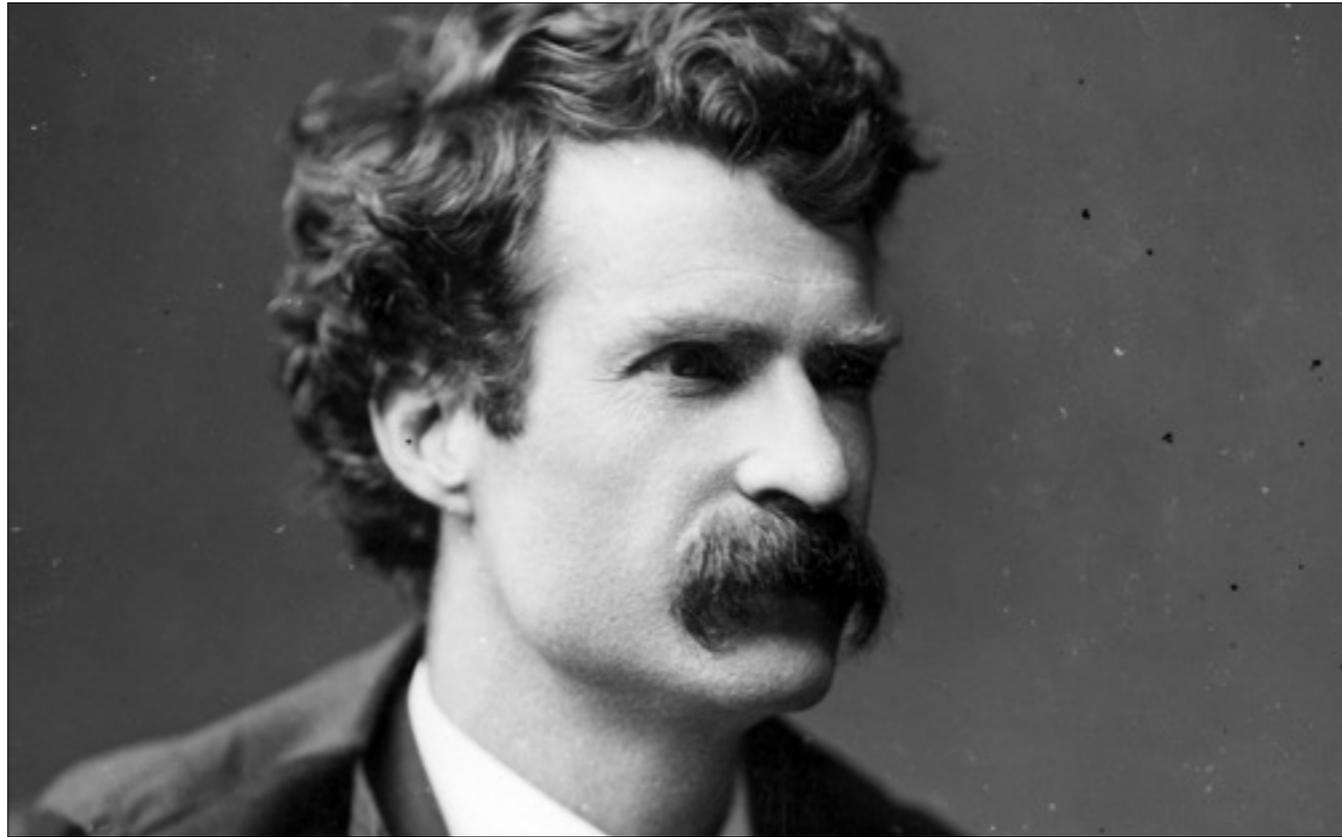
W.R.B. Shaw
The Last of the Manchester 'Defiance'
1864

Collection of
Peter Mosse

Nostalgia can be a funny thing, though, and I like to keep in mind that whatever we might wistfully long for today was once new and modern.

This is another painting from Peter Mosse's collection, called *The Last of the Manchester Defiance*. It's an 1864 copy by WRB Shaw of an 1859 painting by another artist. Peter provided this wonderful quote from the *Illustrated London News* of April 23, 1859, when the original painting first appeared, and I can't help but share it with you.

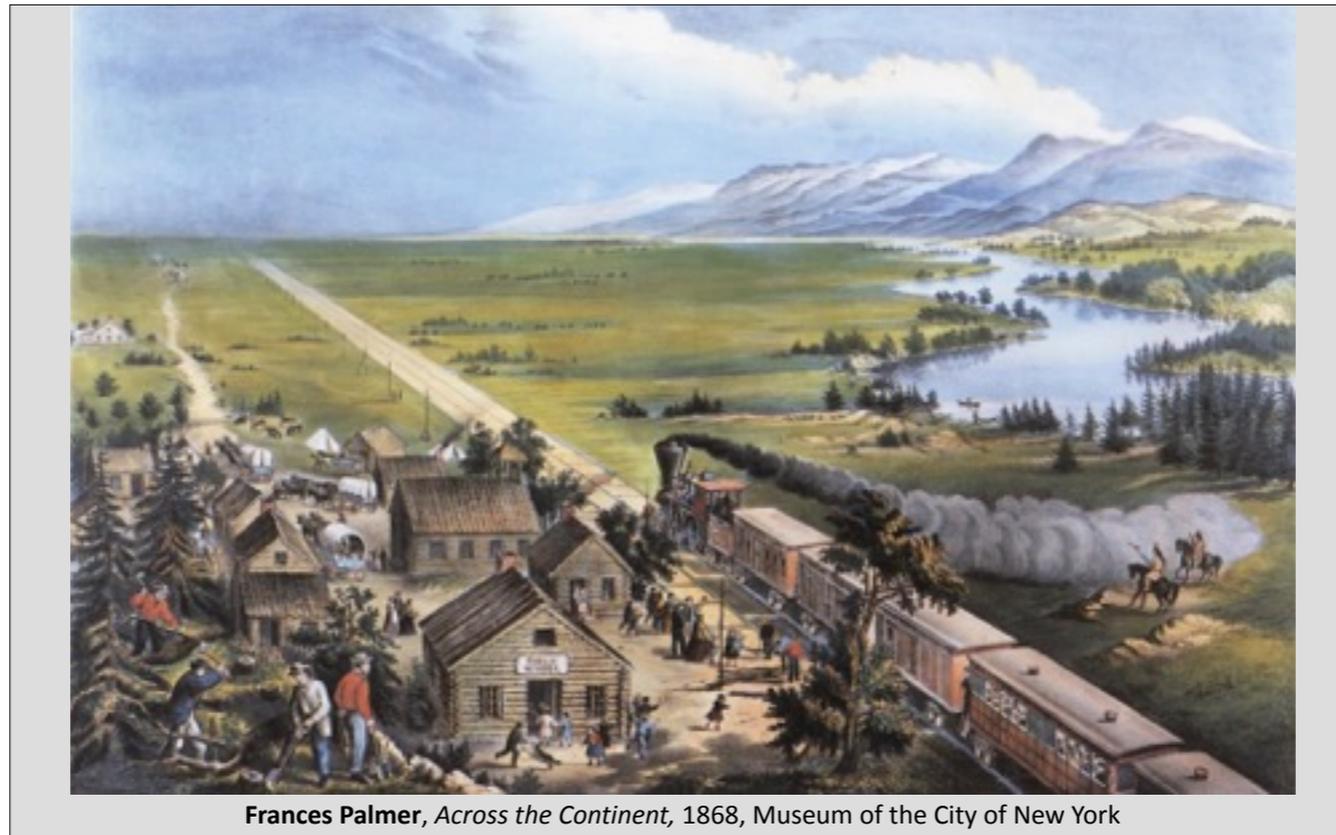
"... a striking illustration of the march of enterprise and civilisation which distinguishes the present age. The old Manchester 'Defiance' which was once the marvel of the travelling world ... has been put off the road by the superior powers of steam ... and there the old wreck lies, horseless and wheelless, with the door off its hinges, a place for fowls to rest in, in a dilapidated inn yard. And the inns themselves ... where extortion and incivility was the rule ... have long been shut up and deserted ... The glass of ale or brandy-and-water, with which the desperate outsider tried to console himself and infuse warmth into his drenched and chilled frame during the brief interval occasioned by the change of horses, is now dispensed with, and a man may arrive sober and comfortable, and collected, at the end of a two-hundred-mile journey without having moved from his snug seat inside his first class carriage ..."



But again, nostalgia is a funny thing. Mark Twain would have had nothing of the commentary found in the Illustrated London News.

Traveling Europe in 1869, Twain had this to say in *The Innocents Abroad*:

It is hard to make railroading pleasant in any country. It is too tedious. Stagecoaching is infinitely more delightful. Once I crossed the plains and deserts and mountains of the West in a stagecoach, from the Missouri line to California, and since then all my pleasure trips must be measured to that rare holiday frolic.



Frances Palmer, *Across the Continent*, 1868, Museum of the City of New York

But again, nostalgia is a funny thing, and minds can change. Just two years later, in 1871, Twain traveled west on our new transcontinental railroad, an event he chronicled in *Roughing It*, published in 1872.

...we rolled out of the station at Omaha, and started westward on our long jaunt. A couple of hours out, dinner was announced—an 'event' to those of us who had yet to experience what it is to eat in one of Pullman's hotels on wheels; so, stepping into the car next forward of our sleeping palace, we found ourselves in the dining-car. It was a revelation to us, that first dinner on Sunday. And though we continued to dine for four days, and had as many breakfasts and suppers, our whole party never ceased to admire the perfection of the arrangements, and the marvelous results achieved.

Incidentally, this print is perhaps the best of the many prints that featured our first transcontinental railroad. Fanny Palmer, an English immigrant, was one of our best and most prolific printmakers. Currier & Ives published many of her works, including this one, whose full title is *Across the Continent: Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way*.

One hallmark of these views of the transcontinental railroad is how the tracks invariably run arrow-straight across the land, a symbol of destiny and permanence. And, interestingly, it's shown here as a double-track line stretching to the horizon, although we know that wasn't the case in 1868!

Palmer work's is layered with additional symbolic meaning. The tracks quite literally divide the untamed natural world on the right with the industry of new civilization on the left. And then there are the two American Indians on horseback, watching helplessly as the smoke of the Iron Horse engulfs them.

John Gast
American Progress
1872

Library of
Congress



Perhaps no image was more overtly symbolic than this one, *American Progress*, by John Gast, published in 1872. Here we have an allegorical female figure symbolizing the American nation, stringing telegraph wires and carrying the book of education as she floats westward with settlers, traveling first on foot, then by covered wagon and stage coach, and finally by train. They drive off American Indians, bison, and other wildlife. Even the weather patterns seem to be reversed, as the light dawning in the east appears to be pushing off the clouds lingering over the mountains to the west.

If these last two images appear a bit heavy-handed in their symbolism, remember that the Civil War had ended just a few years earlier. The nation was reunited, but the union was tenuous and hostilities festered, particularly in the south. These images spoke to renewal, and a new union, with a new economy—defined not by north and south, waterborne transport, and animal power; but defined instead by east and west, iron roads, and the power of steam.

Gabriele Chiattonne
Poster GotthardBahn
1900

Collection of
Albertina Vienna



And it is worth noting that we were not alone in our use of allegorical female figures to illustrate our railways.

This poster, designed in 1900 by Gabriele Chiattonne, portrays Switzerland's Gotthard Railway as the unifier of northern and southern Europe. She stands on the winged wheel of the railways, her hands clutch the many lines of France, Belgium, and Germany. Zurich is right on top of her heart, while the many spiral tunnels and loops of the Gotthard line seem to form her intestines. Below them are the lakes of the south, and great Italian industrial city of Milan.



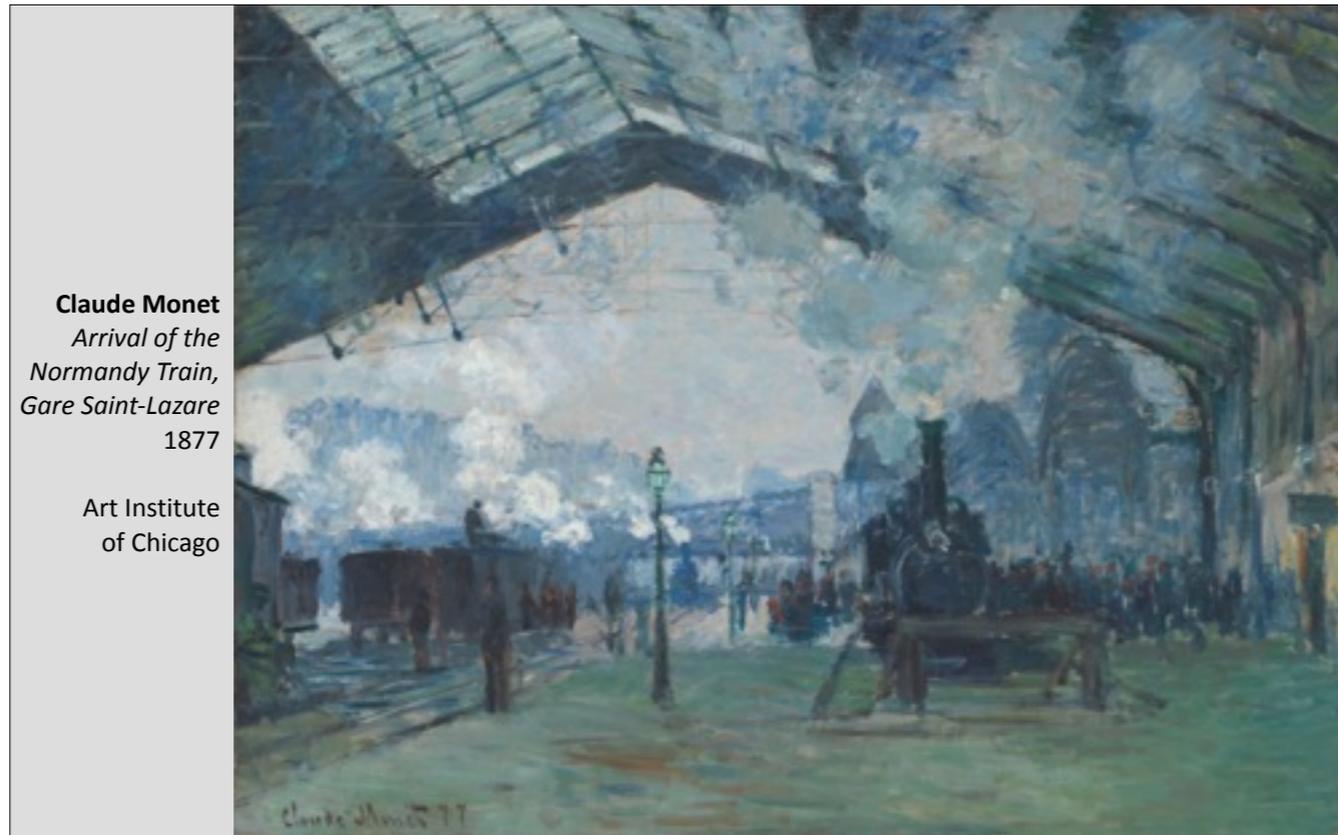
Claude Monet
La Gare
Saint-Lazare
1877
Musée d'Orsay

Since we're in Europe, let's stay there for a moment, and consider the work of French master Claude Monet, founder of impressionism, and widely-acknowledged as one of the greatest painters of all-time.

He made several railway paintings in the 1870s, including a series inside a Paris train station in 1877, and it was these, finally, that helped to fully elevate the railroad to a subject worthy of the fine arts.

Let's think about that for a moment. We read several excerpts by great writers who considered the railroad, and while it does show up frequently in literature, the great railroad novel that you might expect to find in 19th century American or British literature simply does not exist. And it's much the same for these paintings we've been looking at it. There are many that include the railroad, but usually as a small element, off in the distance.

Yet when you stop to consider the greater context of 19th century art, with its dictums of what was proper subject matter and what was not, the very fact that the railroad shows up as much as it does is nothing short of remarkable—and a testament to the railroad's great power and appeal.



Monet was the tipping point. He was the first significant painter, according to Ian Kennedy, “to record the locomotive with any degree of physical presence,” and his station scenes from Paris brought the railroad fully into the realm of art.

The impact was greater, even, than that. In part because of the railroad, everyday objects and common people finally started becoming “suitable” subjects for artists of all kinds.

And while we didn’t get the great railway novel of the 19th century, Walt Whitman did give us a great railway poem, “To a locomotive in winter,” which he wrote in 1876—the same time that Monet was making his railway paintings. I think it’s only fitting to show a few more Monets while reading Whitman’s poem.



Claude Monet
Train in the Snow
1875

Musée
Marmottan
Paris

THEE for my recitative!

Thee in the driving storm, even as now—the snow—the winter-day declining;

Thee in thy panoply, thy measured dual throbbing, and thy beat convulsive;

Thy black cylindric body, golden brass, and silvery steel;

Thy ponderous side-bars, parallel and connecting rods, gyrating, shuttling at thy sides;

Claude Monet
*Gare Saint-Lazare:
Arrival of a Train*
1877

Harvard University
Art Museums,
Fogg Art Museum,
Cambridge



Thy metrical, now swelling pant and roar—now tapering in the distance;
Thy great protruding head-light, fix'd in front;
Thy long, pale, floating vapor-pennants, tinged with delicate purple;
The dense and murky clouds out-belching from thy smoke-stack;
Thy knitted frame—thy springs and valves—the tremulous twinkle of thy wheels;



Claude Monet, *The Goods Train*, 1872. Pola Museum of Art, Hakone

Thy train of cars behind, obedient, merrily-following,
Through gale or calm, now swift, now slack, yet steadily careering:
Type of the modern! emblem of motion and power! pulse of the continent!
For once, come serve the Muse, and merge in verse, even as here I see thee,

Claude Monet
Gare Saint-Lazare,
The Signal
1877

Niedersächsisches
Landesmuseum
Hanover



With storm, and buffeting gusts of wind, and falling snow;
By day, thy warning, ringing bell to sound its notes,
By night, thy silent signal lamps to swing.



Claude Monet
*Train in the
Country*
1871

Musée d'Orsay
Paris

Fierce-throated beauty!
Roll through my chant, with all thy lawless music! thy swinging lamps at night;
Thy piercing, madly-whistled laughter! thy echoes, rumbling like an earthquake, rousing all!



Claude Monet, *Railway Bridge, Argenteuil*, 1873. Nahmad Collection, London

Law of thyself complete, thine own track firmly holding;
(No sweetness debonair of tearful harp or glib piano thine,) Thy trills of shrieks by rocks and hills return'd,
Launch'd o'er the prairies wide—across the lakes,
To the free skies, unpent, and glad, and strong.

From this point forward, the railroad appeared more frequently and in more dominant roles in art of every form.



And that included the brand-new medium of the motion-picture. We'll stay in France for one more slide, to watch one of the very first commercial films in the world.

It features the railroad...of course!

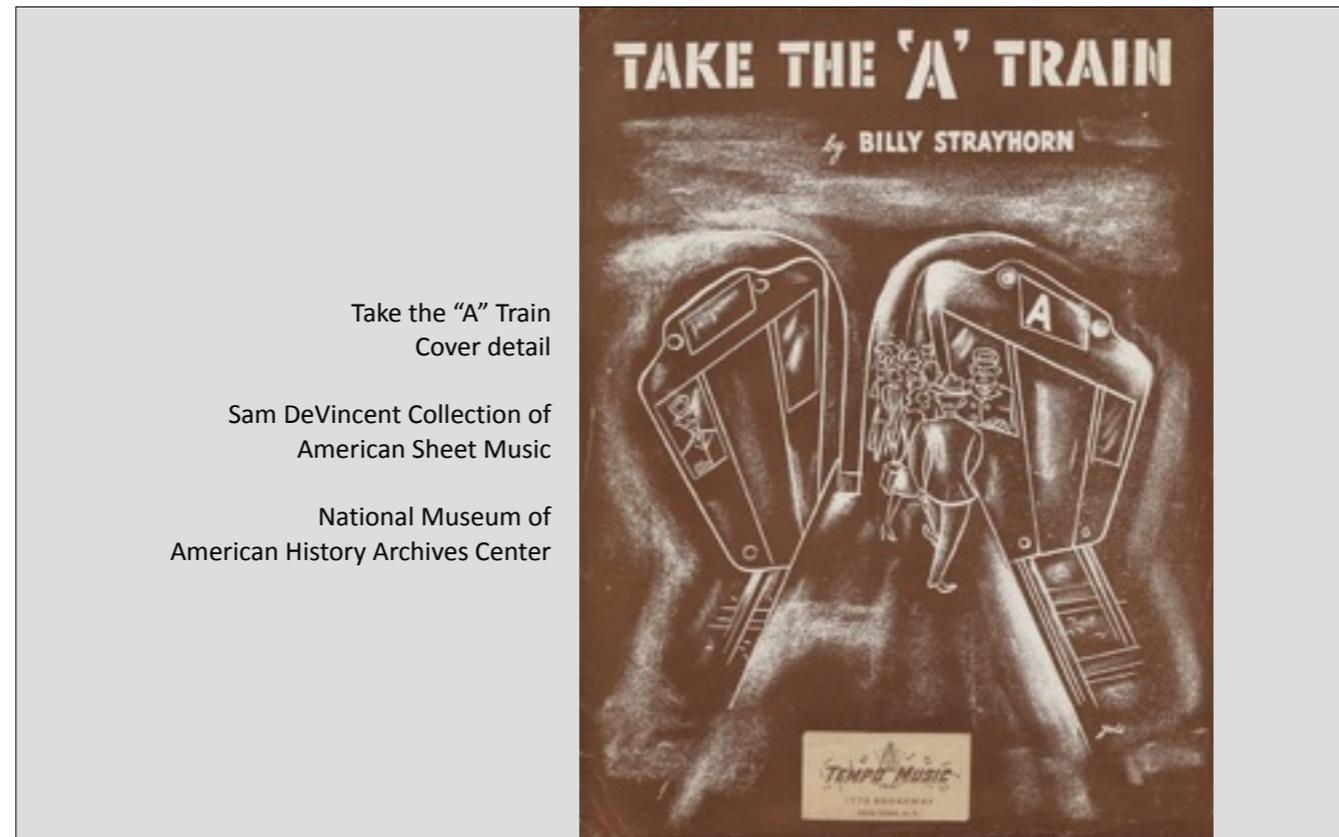
This is "Arrival of a Train," made in 1895 by the Lumiere Brothers.



The 19th century may not have given us the great railroad novel, but the 20th century gave us plenty of great railroad movies.

This is Buster Keaton in his 1926 silent film, *The General*. Initially a flop at the box office, today it is widely considered a classic of the silent era. It also helped establish the cinematic pairing of trains in western landscapes. While the plot is based on the “Great Locomotive Chase” of the Civil War—which took place in Georgia—directors Keaton and Clyde Bruckman filmed their chase scenes in Oregon, where high bridges and steep mountain grades provided a more dramatic setting.

We’d be here all night if we dug very far into railroads and the movies—and while that would be a lot of fun, I’m not prepared to go any farther right now!



Take the "A" Train
Cover detail

Sam DeVincent Collection of
American Sheet Music

National Museum of
American History Archives Center

The same goes for music, but as with movies, it's worth noting as further evidence as just how pervasive the railroad had become in 20th century life.

You won't find many railroad references in classical music, but in so many of the musical genres that developed from the late 19th into the 20th century, the railroad is everywhere.

Making Tracks on the Musical Stage

An introduction to railroad imagery in musical theater

By Aviva Gellman

"There's always one if you will, I've Professor Harold Hill, and I've his co-squisitor a Steve 'The Day's Dream' Jigger. Steve Jigger, says by traveling salesman Harold Hill as he steps off a Rock Island passenger train at fictional West City, Iowa, are just the beginning of his line selling plot to railroad City citizens of their money.

While *The Day's Dream*, first produced in 1937, is a national success of a traveling salesman who will say anything to make a buck, theater of a traveling salesman is anything but national. Since the late 1930s, passenger trains have played the role of both fact and concealer to many a hopeful salesman. As *The Day's Dream* depicts, it's not an easy job, even when you have fairly minimal conditions to understand competing salesmanship. According to the director for the Washington, D.C., regional scene *Stage 42* (later production, more traveling salesman had to "connect with the magnitude of an eagle, and was personally concerned about winning the most of deals."

The first scene of the 1962 film *Bill*, who has somehow managed to hold his entrepreneur position, leading the band through the streets of West City. If Bill had a better idea in how to sell a salesman like Steve, who finally lets himself be second, he would have begged back on a Rock Island train and gone on to the next town. He follows traveling salesman would have found himself in a low ball passenger train not unlike "There is a limited obligation to be made here, starting in the late 1930s, railroad imagery has appeared frequently in musical theater.

Coming to America
In the 1930s, immigrants were coming to the United States in large waves that are before. Each ethnic group came with its own language, entertainment, and religious traditions. None in particular looked to New York to large numbers, often ending in the Lower East Side, and they eventually

came to dominate the New York stage. The Broadway theater district in New York City continued around the subway, which had come to the city at the turn of the century. Strauss and Furstenberg were not of America with strong entertainment traditions, so did soon open their United Kingdom. This generation of musicians, writers, directors, and performers, supported with Broadway. As immigrants became more comfortable with their new lives, they started to branch out from their own ethnicity, utilizing the city's new to get around the city, allowing the theater district to find a prominent place in what's known as the Great Migration. More and more systems of casting backgrounds one each other's shows. In their gradually removed themselves from the confines of their ethnic communities, making their business was best.

Singing While They Work
All new American railroad workers who helped by tracks, especially after the Civil War, contributed a lot to folk music and especially to railroad songs in the United States. As they worked they would sing. Though it was written a few years before it came to the railroad, the popular folk song "The 'I'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain" became prominent in the railroad worker repertoire in the 1930s. Originally from a white area called "When the Chorus Comes," the song speaks of the second coming of Christ. It was sung to both work and leisure time, then a popular way to sing and socialize in the railroad community. The metaphorical tone means give someone a longer than his character and the spirit tone demonstrates the resolve of those following it. They produced initially, "I'll be down 'til white horse when the comes" and "we'll all be singing 'Hallelujah' when she comes."

Shortly after 1930, Dennis Rodgers (1875-1957) entered the railroad music scene. He wrote his railroad, "The Singing Railroadman" after he got a job with the New Orleans and Northshore Railroad in the age of business. Unlike "I'll Be

Coming 'Round the Mountain," one of Rodgers' more famous songs, "The Singing Railroadman" takes a melancholy view of work. The lyrics state "I wish I was a free bird because I'm so tired and I'm not going home again." The music is a folk style song, with the folk music calling "I sing like that helped to shape the idea of a man for those who had just experienced war, and they were miserably susceptible for more business. They often shaped the music to describe musical scenes to come by providing colorful, descriptive language that could be translated related to a scene.

Under the lights, rail scenes became the most folk to give the growing number of songs being the New York theater district. From 1937 to 1951, Chicago actor Henry Jaglom produced his actor's father, a five-city college performance series together from the nation's railroad and labor conditions. "While Willie was largely popular, it was not for everyone. The rich, white upper class benefited the most from both singing shows and location theater. Jaglom and his father from New York to Chicago in 1944 was \$1.50 and in 1951, a night at the Folger was \$2.50. For context, consider that the average yearly wage in 1940 was \$432.7. Theater companies were increased the number of audience members who came from outside New York City, with some from long distances on rail routes in the Midwest-Central Corridor, which began in Chicago-New York route in 1902.

Whistle and the Railroad
One place in the history of the American musical is, in certain conditions, both entertaining and dramatic. In the early 1930s, many white performers began singing in blackface. From the musical theater scene here, theater musical entertainment and business, one purpose of whiteface was to mock black people by making fun of their looks and speech. Some other railroad-themed songs, which were written that they could play themselves better than anyone else. "Whistle" (1934-1935) and "Whistle" (George Walker (1872-1951) became famous



as the black under the cloud which also attracted white, and they went on to write and perform the first black musical on Broadway. They "Whistle" accomplished a lot more in the theater, despite the color of his skin. However, he refused to perform in the South, because he refused to perform in the most segregated South.

Several racial attitudes of the era made it difficult to incorporate, and black performers were routinely transported in poorly maintained cars that lacked some of the basic accommodations offered to white travelers. In Pullman sleeping cars were described many black men found work as porters, sometimes following around the clock to keep porters comfortable and happy. Ironically, they themselves could not afford to travel by Pullman in the South and could be prohibited from it in the South. Women, although managed to get off from something more obvious. The Illinois Central began accepting color payment to help redemptive to view facilities and public hangings. Local agents frequently called to make contact for the musicians.

While traveling has never been historical in a musical, this role related to the

from the first scene show. It is usually depicts the story of the famous 1937 trial of the black man in Alabama after they were accused of raping two young white girls. The song "Commencing in 1938" (George Walker) at the folk station where the trouble began. The excited songwriters are ready to experience the world, and they miss the world of the South as they sing "Staggered, on the Southern Railroad" (Bill Lee). On stage, the song is performed with all stars from helping the housing of a late act as they sing. One of the directors, Howard, notes himself as knowing all the men who were, calling off "Southern to Chicago from in Panama, South to Kansas, West to Jackson. And straight to 'Birmingham.'" This show, which opened in 2019, was staged like a musical show, including back to those socially charged historical production, both black and white.

There's One in the South in the 1940s
For the first two decades of the twentieth century, the opera was the most popular form of musical theater in the country. Commissioned by white European theater or "big" musical theater, many scenes and

shows. The stage set was Harold Hill, standing on a platform of the Rock Island passenger train in the opening scene of a 1937 production of *The Day's Dream* by the Markham Music Theatre, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Photograph by Mark Finken

happy endings," operate other cultural events settings that reveal audience and interpreted them in a different world. In a New York's theater district was really setting up, World War I intervened. All of Broadway supported the war effort, either serving directly as being drafted, or by staying members drafted to positions, as Englishmen found.

Following the stock market crash in 1929, Broadway suffered greatly. During the 1930s, Hollywood movies were another alternative form of theater. The fall in demand for theatrical performance limited a lot of creative growth towards the end of the 1930s. Cole Porter, Elmer Bernstein, and others like Jerry and Olive emerged. One of its songs, entitled "The Day's Dream in the South," was a train metaphor as a way to build community in the United States moments of "Whistle, South Carolina. The lyrics encourage everyone to bond

And even in musical theater, which we covered in the Center's journal in 2014. I'd like to point out the author, too: Aviva Gellman, Aaron's granddaughter. She joined us as an intern in the summer of 2013, at Aaron's suggestion, and has continued to work for us, off and on as her schedule allows, ever since. She inherited her grandfather's love of all forms of transportation, as well as his great intellectual curiosity. It hadn't occurred to me that you could fill even a page about railroads and musical theater, but she had a great interest in the subject and found more than enough for a feature article.



She begins with the opening number from *The Music Man*, where traveling salesman Harold Hill sings aboard a Rock Island passenger train, to music that mimics the clackety-clack of steel wheels on jointed rail. The photograph, incidentally, is from a 2011 production by the Skylight Music Theatre in Milwaukee.



George Luks
*Roundhouse at High
Bridge*
c. 1910

Williams-Proctor Institute
Museum of Art

Back to paintings...

When the American painter George Luks finished his *Roundhouses at High Bridge* in 1910—in which, to quote Ian Kennedy again, he “depicted an everyday occurrence in a nondescript location and found in it unexpected grandeur”—it further signified the dominance of the railroad in modern life. As foreshadowed by George Inness more than a half century earlier, industrial capitalism is shown as the national religion, and the smoking roundhouse has replaced St. Peter’s as the basilica of the New World.

Austin Mecklem
*Engine House
and Bunkers*
1934

Smithsonian
American Art
Museum



With the rise of Modernism in the early 20th century, the conflict of technology and nature faded in artistic dialog, as the city replaced the wilderness as the central theme occupying the national imagination. Modernist painters used railroad imagery to portray the progressive vitality of the modern world, with images of trains evoking the notions of speed and power.

When the Depression-era Public Works of Art Project asked artists to depict “The American Scene,” many tackled industrial subjects, including railroads. Austin Mecklem left his home in rural Woodstock, New York, and traveled to the industrial Hudson River port of Kingston where he painted his dramatic *Engine Houses and Bunkers*, a large-format oil painting featuring a locomotive shop as its centerpiece. The work vividly portrays manmade objects, yet humans appear very small and nature is pushed to the boundaries.

Stanhope Forbes
The Terminus,
Penzance Station
1925

Peter Mosse Collection



Meanwhile back in England, we find similar trends. There was no question that the railway was worth the attention of the nation's best artists.

This painting, completed by Stanhope Forbes in 1925, was a study for a larger work. Peter Mosse acquired this one; the final version, which is a much wider landscape format, resides at the National Railway Museum in York, England.

As with Mecklem, the built environment occupies nearly all of the composition. Here, though, the people are far more prominent, and we see all walks of life mingling on the station platform—evidence of the great democratizing force of railway travel.

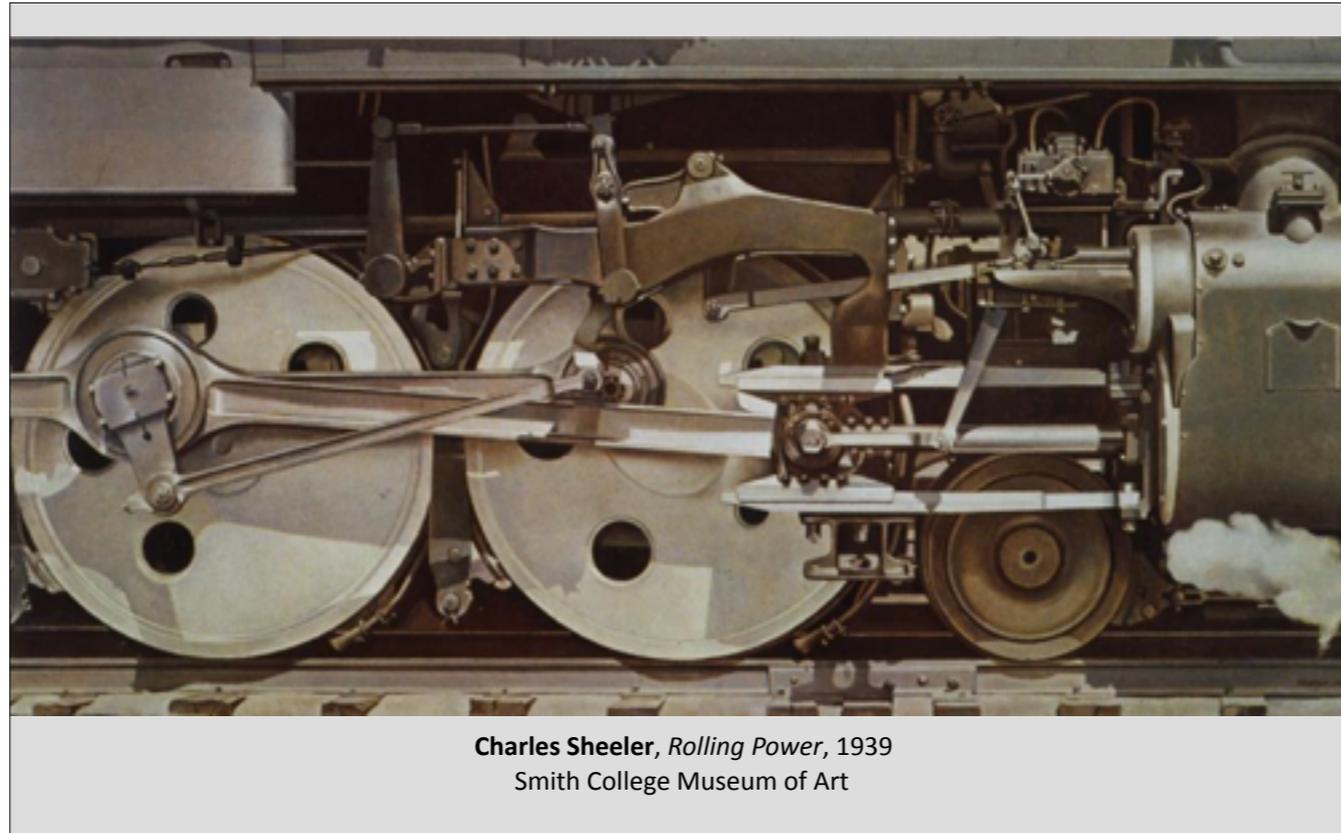


**Thomas Hart
Benton**
*The Engineer's
Dream*
1931

Memphis Brooks
Museum of Art

We talked earlier about speed, and how the railroad was so much faster than anything that preceded it. With the quest for ever-greater speed came growing concerns and unease about safety.

Thomas Hart Benton, a Regionalist painter who came from the Modernist school, celebrated rural American life in much of his work. Trains were frequent subjects, and two his paintings tackle concerns over safety head-on. This one, *The Engineer's Dream* from 1931, shows a nightmare or a premonition. At lower, an engineer sleeps, fully dressed for duty with his railroad lantern and alarm clock beside him. He dreams of a wreck, where his speeding train cannot stop in time to avoid a washed-out bridge. We see him attempting to jump to safety, but his chances don't look very good. The signalman's red flag is wholly inadequate against the powerful locomotive, perhaps a commentary on safety systems of the day.



Charles Sheeler, *Rolling Power*, 1939
Smith College Museum of Art

For the steam locomotive, the most significant Modernist painting is this one, Charles Sheeler's 1939 masterpiece, *Rolling Power*.

It is a close-up, Precisionist study of the wheels, rods, and valve gear of a New York Central class J-3a Hudson locomotive, of *Twentieth Century Limited* fame. While the locomotive features streamlining by noted industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss, Sheeler chose to focus on the least streamlined, most raw, mechanical elements.

More recent photographic efforts have made views like this almost cliché, but *Rolling Power* was nothing short of groundbreaking in its day. It has been hailed as a radical departure from previous artistic representations of trains, for the way it redefines beauty in the image of a functional object.

We've been watching artists for more than 100 years grapple with what the steam railroad meant. It's almost ironic to me, then, that in 1939, on the eve of its replacement by diesels, the steam locomotive finally transcended the societal questions surrounding it, freed from context as a thing of beauty unto itself.

Leo Marx, author of *The Machine in the Garden*, the seminal literary work about technology in nature, provides a fitting summary: "How foolish it is," he reminds us, "to hold any machines responsible for the damage people have done, or may yet do, with their help."

The End of STEAM

The steam locomotive was the single most compelling icon of the railroad. Without it, artistic representations changed greatly. It's worth noting that, after our next artist, Edward Hopper, this is also where the critical commentary runs dry. The academic community has yet to take on a major consideration of railroads and art in the past sixty years, but I think there's still plenty to see.



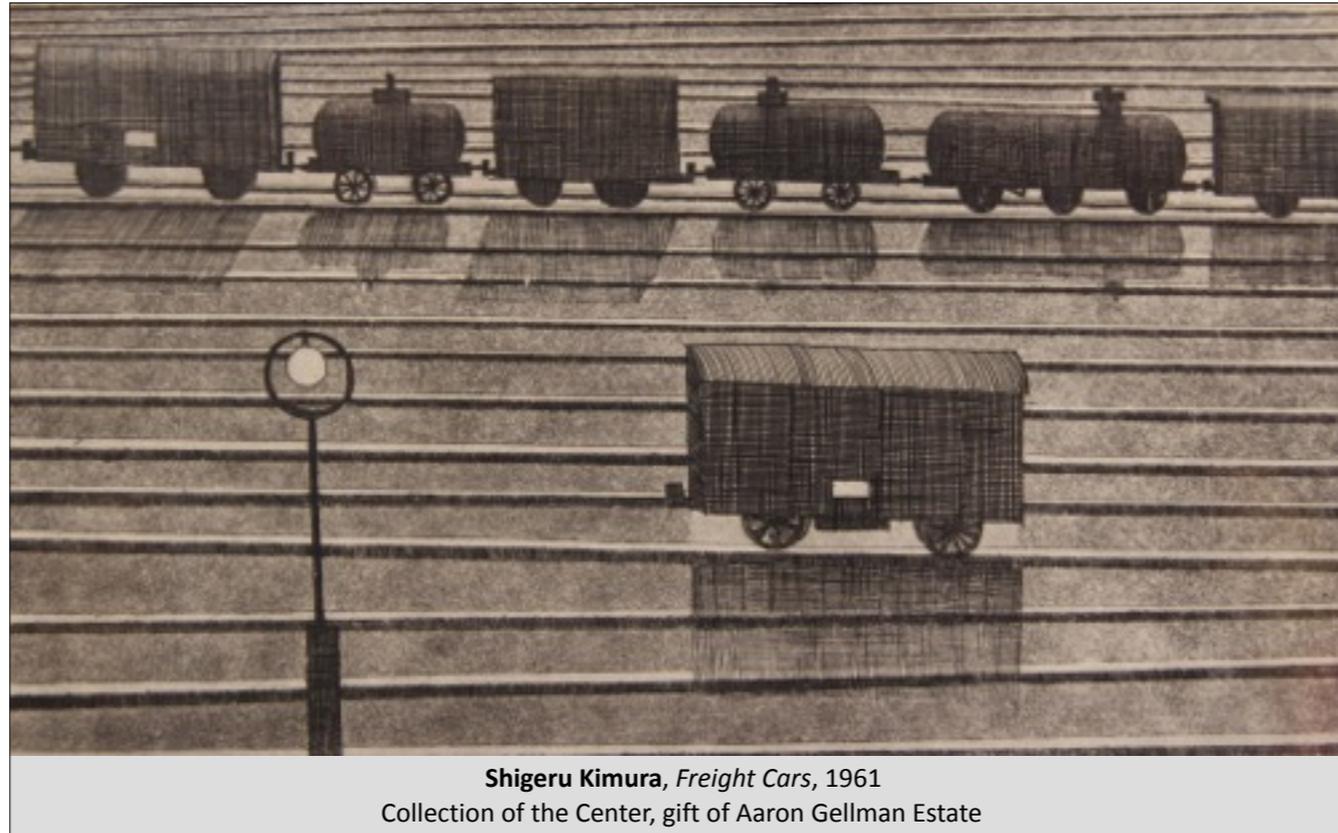
Edward Hopper
Railroad Sunset
1929

Whitney Museum
of American Art

Even before the end of steam, some artists were considering other aspects of the railroad.

One of the most famous 20th century American artists to consider railroads was Edward Hopper. He painted them, Ian Kennedy pointed out, “because they were part and parcel with his experience of American life.” And he also painted them with enough frequency that they must have held some special meaning. Yet despite growing up in the age of steam, Hopper focused on other railroad subjects besides locomotives.

One consistent theme throughout almost all of Hopper’s work, railroad and otherwise, was the loneliness and alienation he felt was an ever-greater part of modern American life. You certainly see that here, with the signal tower standing alone and empty against the twilight sky.



Shigeru Kimura, *Freight Cars*, 1961
Collection of the Center, gift of Aaron Gellman Estate

Interestingly enough, there's a bit of the Hopper-esque in this print from Aaron Gellman's collection.

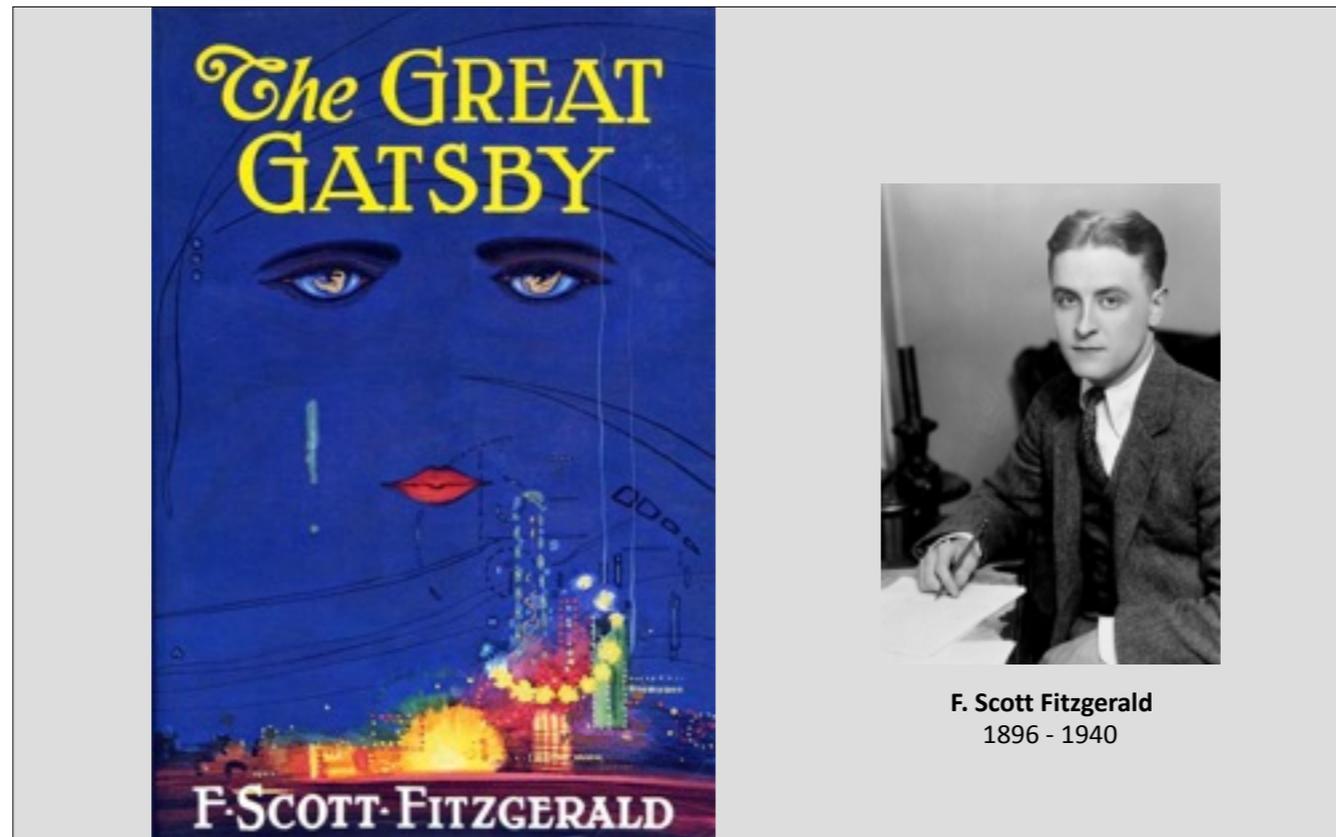
The artist is Shigeru Kimura, a reasonably well-known printmaker in Japan. I've not been able to find out much more about him, but railways do appear to be frequent subjects in his work. There's a bit of playfulness here, but there's also a real sense of loneliness, particularly with the isolation of the single car in the foreground. Incidentally I sent this image to Peter Mosse not long after we acquired the print, and Hopper came immediately to mind for him, too.

Edward Hopper
Chair Car
1965

Private Collection



One more from Hopper, a late work from 1965, just two years before he died, called *Chair Car*. Again, the themes of loneliness and alienation are strong, this time reinforced by the presence of multiple, but very isolated, people.

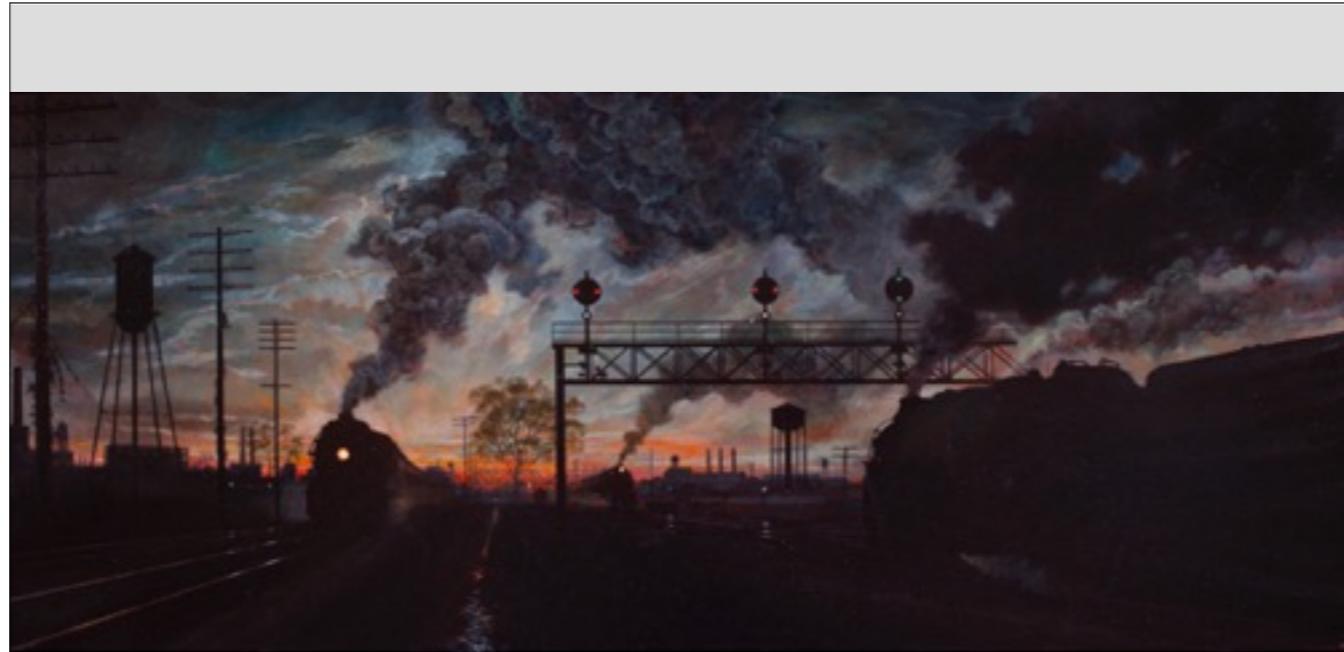


Alienation is a central theme of what some critics and scholars consider the greatest American novel of the 20th century, *The Great Gatsby*. It deals even more with what author F. Scott Fitzgerald considered to be the excesses of an overly materialistic culture that dominated the 1920s. Prophetically, perhaps, the automobile is the dominate (and highly symbolic) mode of transportation in the book, but there's a poignant passage about railroads at the end, in a flashback scene for Nick Carraway, the novel's narrator.

When we pulled out into the winter night and the real snow, our snow, began to stretch out beside us and twinkle against the windows, and the dim lights of small Wisconsin stations moved by, a sharp wild brace came suddenly into the air. We drew in deep breaths of it as we walked back from dinner through the cold vestibules, unutterably aware of our identity with this country for one strange hour, before melting indistinguishably into it again.

That's my Middle West—not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth...

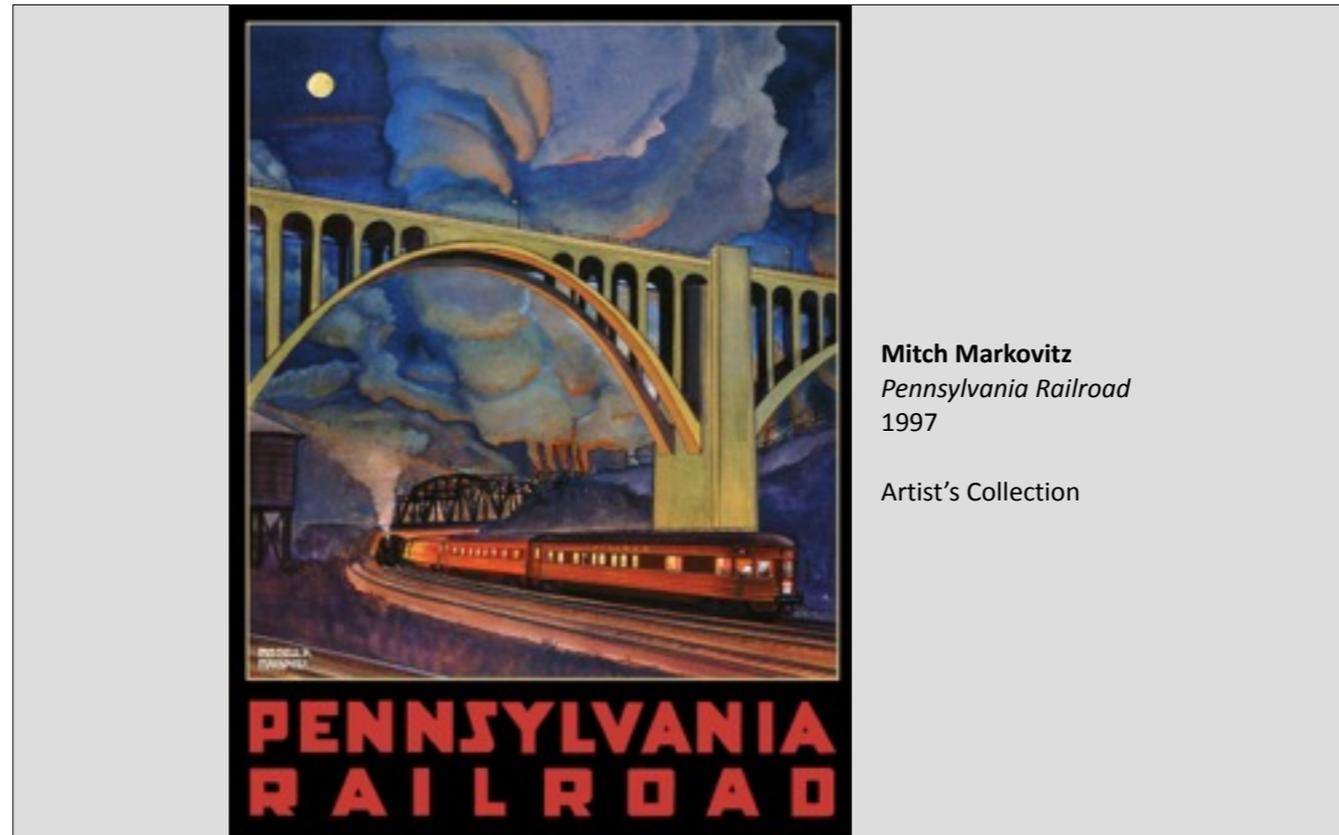
I said we'd be getting back to nostalgia, and here we are.



Michael Flanagan, *Untitled*, circa 1990. Collection of Peter Mosse

Nostalgia is the dominant theme of most railroad paintings of the last fifty years, which have seen the rise of a distinct genre of railroad art, whose hallmark is incredibly well-executed paintings of scenes that no longer exist, with the steam locomotive often the central figure.

Most of these paintings are very good, and some are downright stunning, like Michael Flanagan's evocative works, inspired by a steam-era Baltimore & Ohio Railroad that he barely knew yet clearly longed for. Flanagan wrote and illustrated a novel called *Stations*, published in 1994, that is a beautiful and evocative portrayal of his longing for the steam railroads he saw as a child.



Mitch Markovitz
Pennsylvania Railroad
1997

Artist's Collection

Closer to this part of the world, Mitch Markovitz lives just across the border in Indiana and used to work for the South Shore, both as an illustrator for advertising art and as a motorman. Along with his son, he presented at our conference in 2013 and had us all in stitches with his deadpan comedic delivery. He studied at the American Academy of Art in downtown Chicago and imbues his work with graphic energy. He paints contemporary railroad scenes, but one of my favorites of his is this poster he created about a Pennsylvania Railroad that he never knew.



Mike Danneman
*Rio Grande
through the
Flatirons*
2008

Artist's Collection

I said that nostalgia is a funny thing, and it might be hard to imagine having nostalgia for second-generation diesel locomotives, but we've arrived at that point, especially for the generation who grew up with them. Mike Danneman, who lives just outside Denver, is part of that generation, who longs for not only these now-retired "tunnel motor" diesels, but also the Denver & Rio Grande Western, one of many railroad identities merged out of existence and now part of the Union Pacific system. Mike is not only an incredibly talented painter, but he's also a phenomenal photographer and a master model railroader, and we were honored to have him present at our 2014 conference.



John Austin
King John
at Dawlish

Collection of
Peter Mosse

Nostalgia is strong in England, too, as we can see again thanks to Peter Mosse.

Today the standard-bearer of British railway artists is John Austin, who attended our conference two years ago as a guest of Peter's, and we hope to have him back as a presenter. This painting shows one of the Great Western's 6000-class locomotives, the King John, pulling a passenger at Dawlish, on the South Coast, sometime before they were withdrawn from service in the early 1960s.

Nostalgia is a strong emotion, and a great motivator of current railway artists on both sides of the ocean...but it's not the only motivation behind recent rail art.



Tom Fawell, *General Motors GP38-2, 1974*

Tom Fawell created advertising art for General Motors for more than 20 years. It's tempting to dismiss commercial art in the context of what we've been talking about today, but Fawell's style is so incredibly bold and strong that he demands our consideration. The GP38-2 is about as utilitarian a locomotive as they come, yet with Fawell, they are bigger than life, faster, and twice as powerful.

Tom presented at our conference in 2012, and told us about landing his assignment with GM.

He said an account rep, John Callahan, from the Marsteller Agency, noticed Tom's work and thought he might be a good fit for one of their clients, the Electro-Motive Division of General Motors. John gave Tom the specs for the ad, various blue prints of the locomotive, some rough copy, and said "do what ever you want" —music to any artist's ears!

The presentation to EMD didn't go too well. In fact the EMD managers laughed at Tom's work. They said, "It has no wheels," "The sky is too rough," and "the train looks like it's going to fall over." They threw his drawings in the trash. Callahan, the ad rep, wasn't deterred. He made sure some of Tom's drawings made it "upstairs" to EMD's corporate office, where he prevailed on the executives to give it a try. After the first ad hit, EMD visibility skyrocketed, and the rest is history.



Roger Watt, *Reclamation*, 2013

In 2013, we conducted a survey of current railroad artists in North America, which he published in *Railroad Heritage*. Peter Mosse put us in touch with Canadian Roger Watt, who makes exquisitely-detailed graphite drawings. This one might still rely on nostalgia, but it's a different take, as Watt does not try to recreate the past, and embraces the weeds slowly "reclaiming" this steam locomotive.

Adam Normandin
Metamorphosis
2013

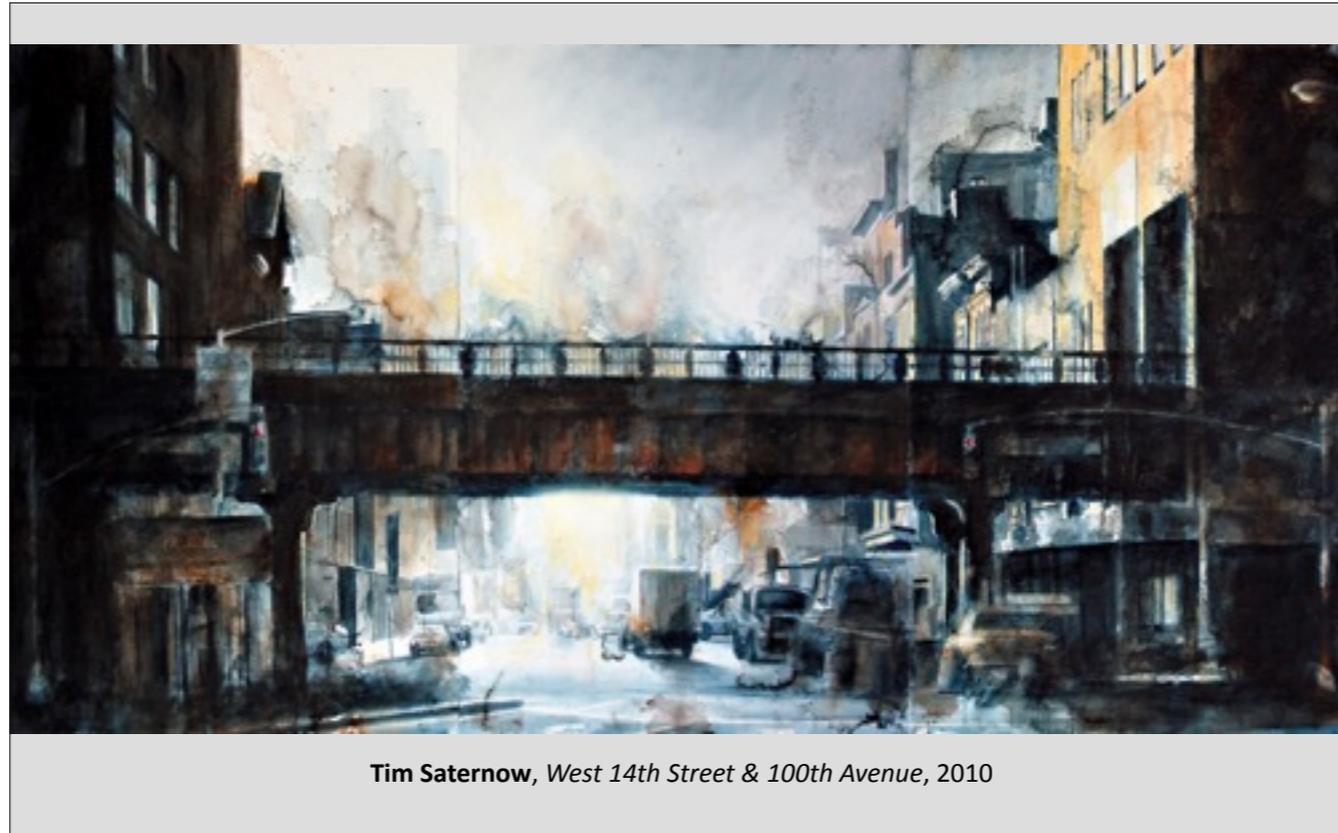


Peter also put us in touch with Adam Normandin, who paints contemporary railroad subject in acrylics with photorealistic precision. I'm especially intrigued by Normandin's use of motion—both his skilled renditions of moving trains, and his choice to depict it at all.

Charlie Hunter
August Bridge
2012



Through our art survey, we also connected with Charlie Hunter, an artist in Vermont who recently organized a show of railroad-themed works in the style he calls contemporary realism. We turned it into an article for this summer's issue of *Railroad Heritage*.



It included this 6-foot-wide piece by Tim Saternow, of one of the bridge's of the High Line on Manhattan's West Side.

Saternow says, "I look up under these trestles as they pass over the side streets: West Twenty-First, West Twenty-Third, West Thirtieth. What I see are huge I-beams built to hold the tonnage of the freight cars that served the warehouses of Far West Chelsea. This is what I'm most drawn to, the sheer mass and scale of these bridges. I paint the old rusty High Line and that memory of a lost American industrial strength. I celebrate old steel, produced in the foundries in Pittsburgh, and the concrete slowly disintegrating into dust."



J. Craig Thorpe
King Street Station
Concept Rendering

One of my favorite presentations at our conference this spring was by J. Craig Thorpe, an artist in Seattle who frequently paints “Concept Art,” giving visual form to transportation projects, often to help them get off the ground. His paintings are frequently used in town hall meetings to convince skeptical residents of what a proposed project will actually look like. Craig titled his presentation, “Painting the Possible,” and we’re working on turning it into an article for *Railroad Heritage*, too.

We’ve covered a lot of ground here, and there’s so much I had to leave out in the interest of time, but I hope this provided some useful context, both for the history of railroads in art, and to give you a sense of what’s happening with railroads and art today.

Railroads and PHOTOGRAPHY

I want to finish up by spending a little time on photography. First, though, I have to address the distinction we make at the Center between photography and art, as that can invite the question of what is art, and what is not. I want to make clear that I believe some photography achieves the status of art—definitely not all of it, probably not most of it, but some of it certainly does. There's also a lot of photography out there that might not be considered art, but that is still very interesting and valuable. So, by calling ourselves the Center for Railroad Photography & Art, we simply have more latitude in the photography department.



Unknown

Tioga

c. 1849

Smithsonian

The relationship between railroads and photography is imminently worthy of study. The two grew up together. The first railroads emerged in the late 1820s, and the first commercially-viable photographic process, the Daguerreotype, was introduced in 1839. Railroads immediately became favorite photography subjects, and they still are, more than 175 years later.



Early cameras were heavy, cumbersome, and slow—much too slow to stop the action of a moving train, so early railroad photographs tend to show static, staged, or posed scenes. And due to the time, effort, and expense required for each exposure, they tend only to show something of great significance. But keep in mind that, in the 1850s, the arrival of a new locomotive in most any small town in the country would have been an event of great significance.



The first major American conflict witnessed by photographic was the Civil War, and of course that was also the first major American conflict for the railroad.

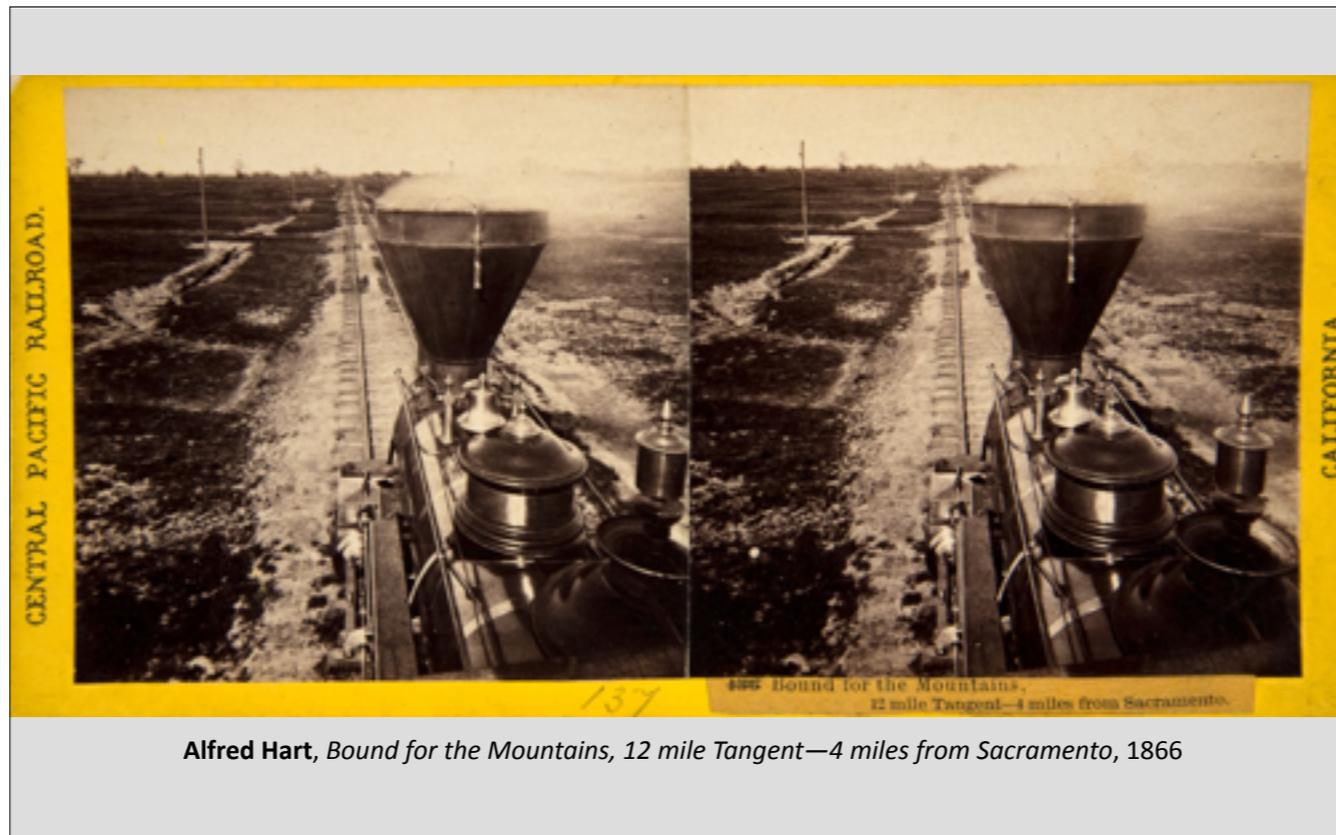
This is the ruined roundhouse in Atlanta, Georgia, after General William T. Sherman's Atlanta Campaign. The albumen print was made by George Barnard in 1866, and it resides at the Library of Congress.

Even today, we like to think of photography as a truthful method of visual representation. That was a big part of its early appeal, and while that notion goes a long way, it's always been a little problematic. Look closely at the sky just above the horizon line. If it looks a little strange, it should. A distinctive attribute of Barnard's printing was to superimpose clouds from a different shot into an otherwise overexposed sky. So while we can say with some degree of certainty that the locomotives, roundhouse, and other buildings were all in Atlanta, we have no idea where those clouds came from. Today people worry a great deal about this sort of thing with digital photography, and programs like Photoshop do make it much easier, but it's nothing new.

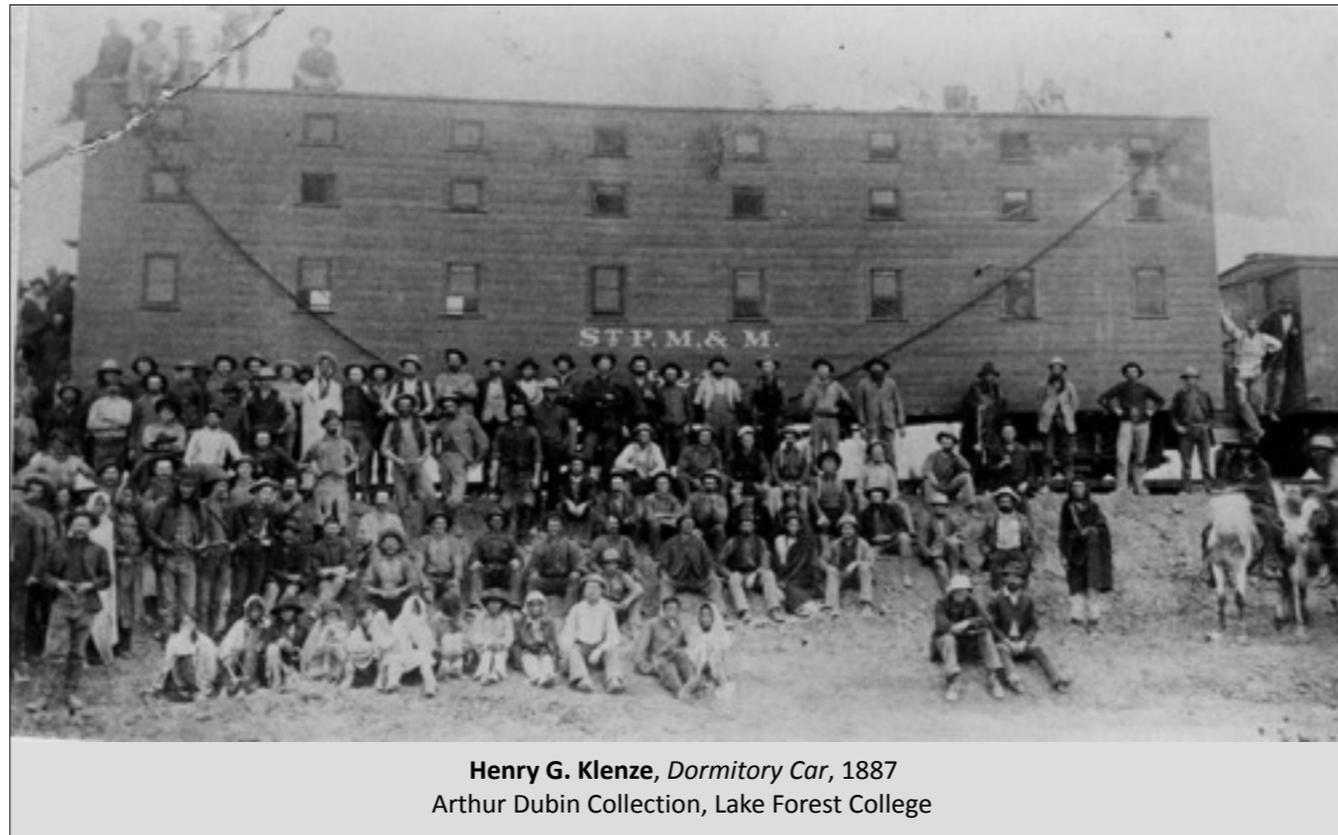


Andrew J. Russell
*Steam Shovel at
Hanging Rock,
Echo Canyon*
c. 1868

Oakland Museum
of California



Alfred Hart, Bound for the Mountains, 12 mile Tangent—4 miles from Sacramento, 1866



b/t Minot, ND, and Helena, MT
St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railway, Great Northern predecessor



Photographer unknown, Old Colony Railroad, portrait of 0-4-0T #28 "Monitor" with crew, c. 1870–80s
Collection of Jeff Brouws

Some Vernacular Railroad Photographs

Brouws is board member, several books on railroad photography

Showing several from his collection



Photographer unknown

Railroad unknown

*Portrait of railroad workers
positioned around hand car*

Location unknown

c. 1880s?

Collection of Jeff Brouws

The greater convenience of photography enabled a broader consideration of the railroad environment, including people—not just executives, but everyday workers

Extension of art dialog of 19th century painters



Wm. H. Jackson
Echo Cliffs,
Grand River
Canyon, Colorado
c. 1890

Railroad photography extended to the landscapes themselves, as the railroads quickly discovered the power of imagery to promote their passenger trains to would-be travelers

Jackson, 1843-1942, born in NY, went west on UP in 1866, to end of line

Commissioned by railroad in 1869 to photograph its landscapes
Lived in the west for the next several decades

Example of photochrome, early example of color



William Henry Jackson, La Veta Pass, c. 1890s.
Collection of Jeff Brouws

Denver & Rio Grande Railroad
Engine 99 'Kokomo' and Engine 46 'Bandito' on passenger train
La Veta Pass, Colorado

Posed—crew, long exposure (wispy steam)

Glass plates, as big as 18x22 inches (stunning, but required long exposures)



Not the exclusive domain of the west

In 1890, B&O hired Jackson to photograph their railroad for a display at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition here in Chicago

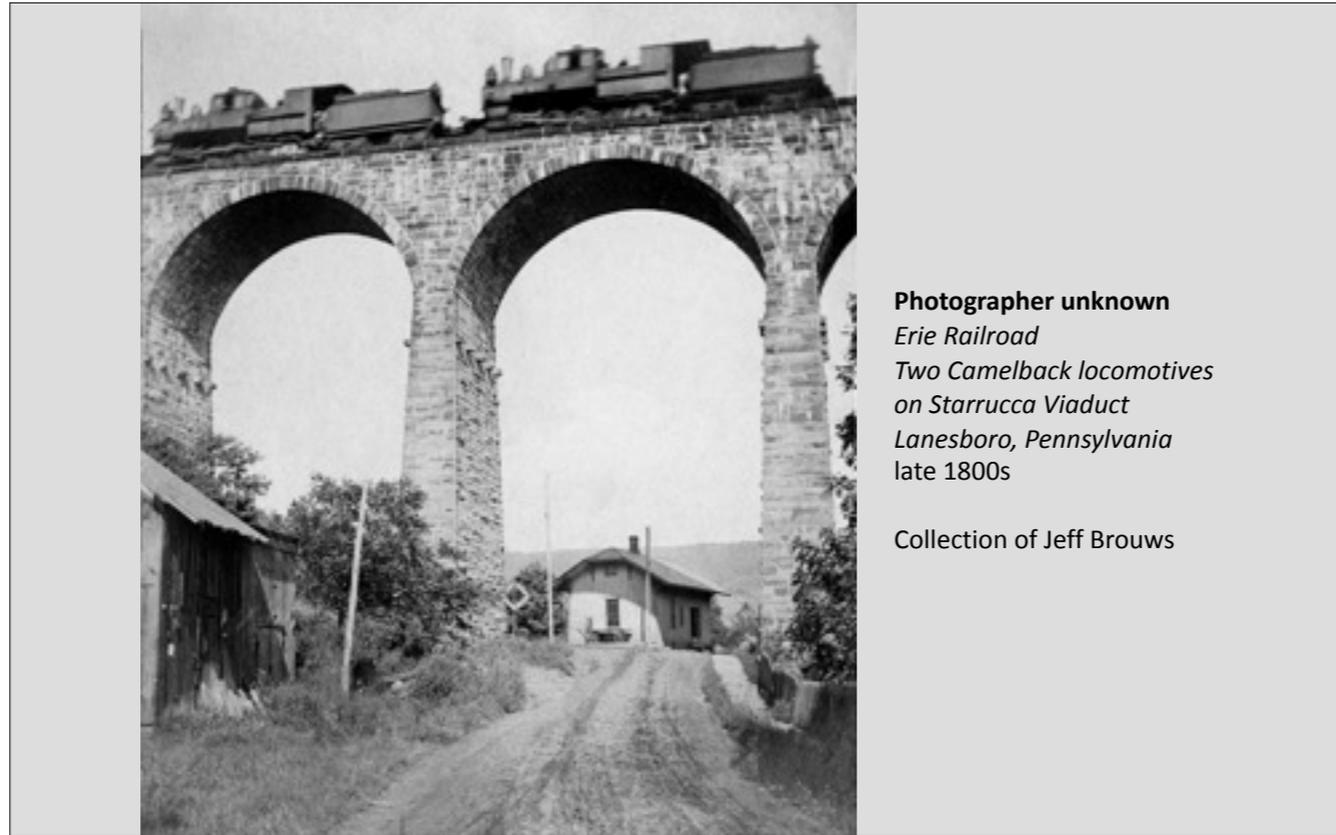
Gave him his own train, which he posed at scenic locations across the railroad

This is on the B&O's famed 17-mile grade near the West Virginia-Maryland border



Photographer unknown
*Rutland Railroad
Yard scene with
roundhouse
Rutland, Vermont
c. 1895*

Collection of
Jim Shaughnessy

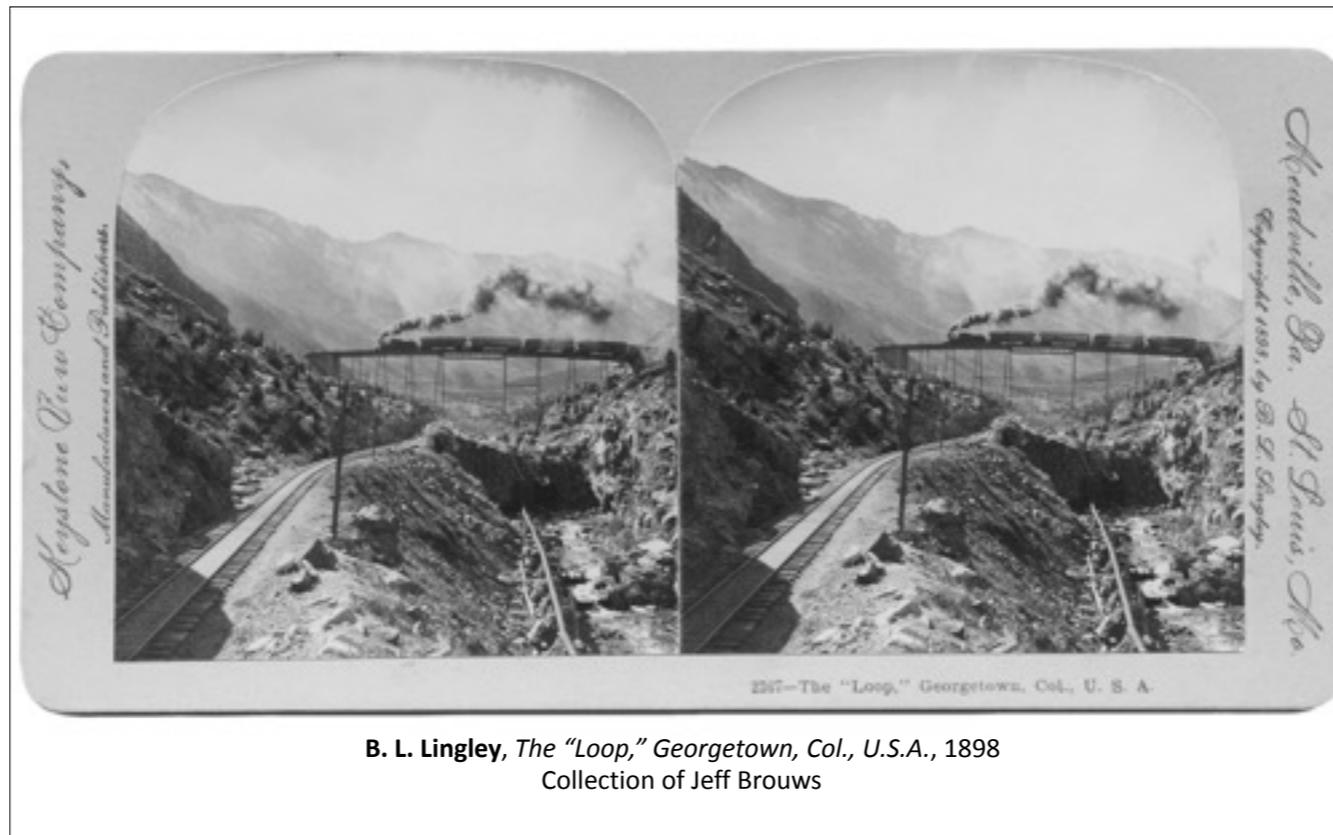


Same location as Cropsey's painting!

Here we see some motion blur in the locomotives. They're not perfectly sharp, but we know they were moving. The camera didn't completely "freeze" them, but it came close.

The dry plate, also known as the gelatin process, invented in 1871 and quickly grew in popularity

Started long trend of smaller, faster cameras—also cheaper, which made photography more accessible—practiced by amateurs as well as professionals



B. L. Lingley, *The "Loop," Georgetown, Col., U.S.A., 1898*
Collection of Jeff Brouws

Here's another stereocard, this one by B.L. Lingley and showing the spectacular Georgetown Loop in Colorado.

Note the train—the smoke plume tells us that it was moving. I'm sure it was going slowly, but even so, it was moving, and it's rendered here in total sharpness. Cameras were getting better—both lighter and faster



Wrecks were also common subjects for early photography, and of course they're still popular today.

This one is from the Ann Arbor Railroad at Ann Arbor, Michigan



Alfred Stieglitz
The Hand of Man
1902

The Metropolitan
Museum of Art

Then, a watershed:

Alfred Stieglitz ran a photography gallery in New York and edited two leading photography journals, working to promote photography and elevate it to the status of fine art in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Hand of Man, which shows a train in Long Island City, likely photographed from the rear platform of another train, was first published in January 1903

From the Met:

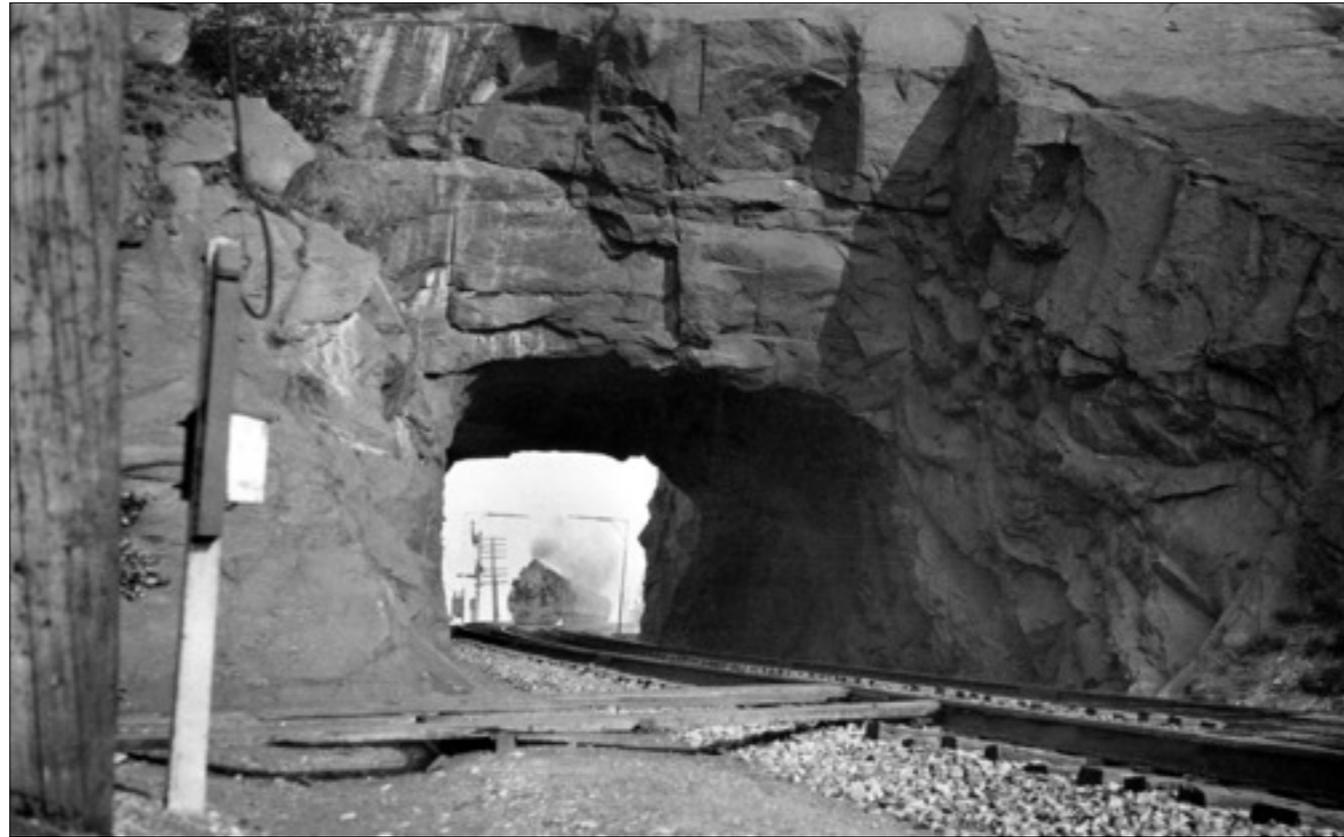
Stieglitz showed that a gritty urban landscape could have an atmospheric beauty and a symbolic value as potent as those of an unspoiled natural landscape. The title alludes to this modern transformation of the landscape and also perhaps to photography itself as a mechanical process. Stieglitz believed that a mechanical instrument such as the camera could be transformed into a tool for creating art when guided by the hand and sensibility of an artist.



Unknown
Detroit Publishing Co.
*Construction view of
Pennsylvania Station*
1910

Library of Congress

Construction view, but artfully done



By the 1920s, photography was fully available to the hobbyist: cameras were small, fast, and relatively cheap, and certainly by 20s the notion of the railfan photographer was taking shape

One of the best, and most creative, of this era was a Swiss immigrant named Fred Eidenbenz, who ran a shop in New York City. His favorite Sunday afternoon pastime was to go hiking along the Hudson River and photograph trains on the New York Central



Eidenbenz also traveled extensively in the U.S., photographing trains wherever he went. That include a trip to southern West Virginia, where he rode atop a loaded coal car on the Virginian Railway. The Virginian electrified its crossing of the Alleghenies in the late 1920s—the wires are up in this image, but not yet turned on. Pushing Fred’s train is one of the railway’s massive 2-10-10-2 articulated steam locomotives.

This is the first example we’ve seen of a trend that is now quite common in railroad photography: recording something that is about to disappear. [Preemptive nostalgia.] Most of the photographs we’ve been looking at up to this point showcased something new. This gets at the significance of amateur, enthusiast photography. The railroad would never have sent a company photography to document what they were so eager to replace. They waited to send their photographer to record the brand-new electric locomotives. It’s thanks to the work of Eidenbenz, and so many enthusiasts like him, that we have a visual record of so much of railroading.

I should also note that Eidenbenz eventually returned to Switzerland and spent his final years running their national transportation museum, to which he donated his photography. These images come to us from the museum, with the help of Lorenz Degen, currently the only Swiss member of the Center!



Bryan Beard, N&W company photographer
Shaffer's Crossing, Roanoke, Virginia
September 29, 1943

View is from atop the coaling tower
At least fifty locomotives pictured



C&NW
Proviso Roundhouse

Delano and OWI project



Exhibition with Chicago History Museum
21 months, April 2014 to January 2016
Close to half a million visitors

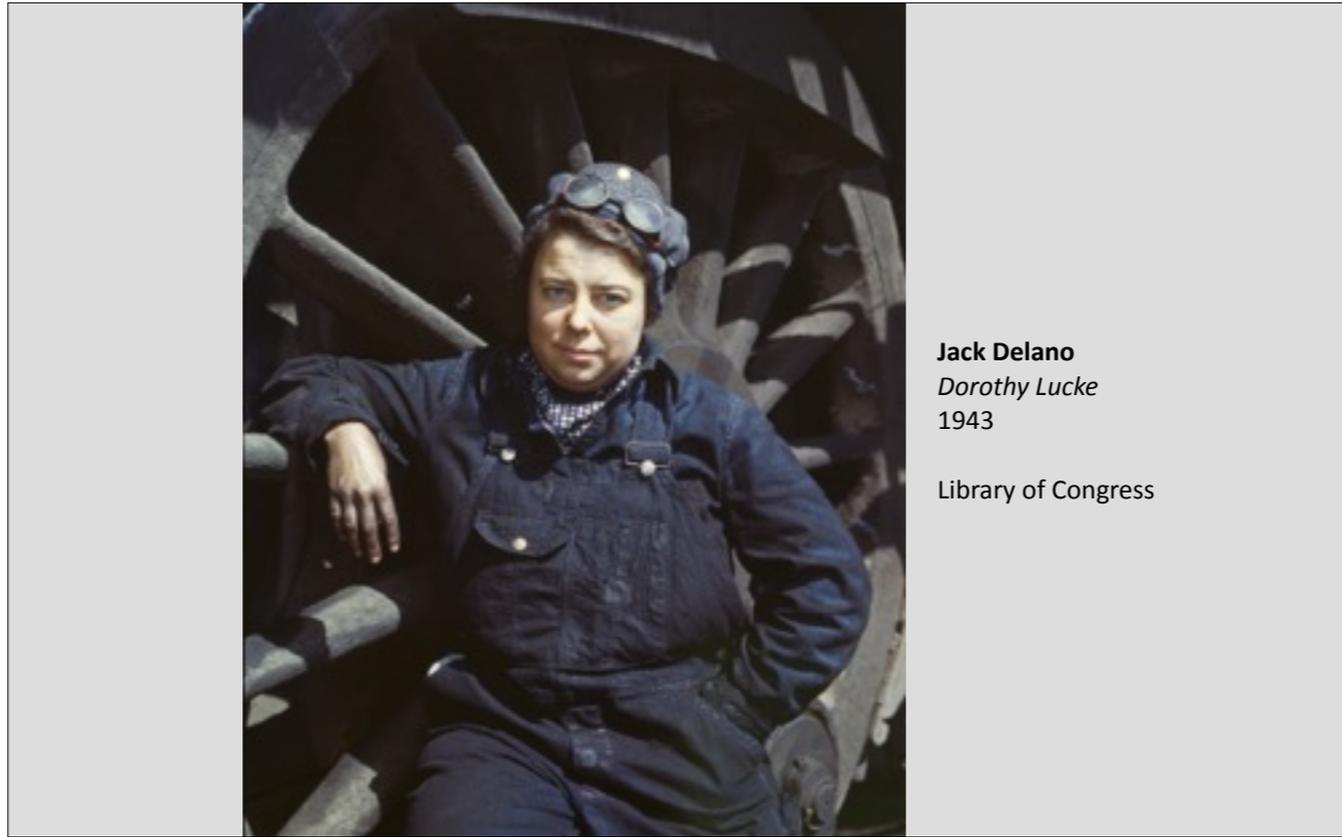
Entry graphic shows a five-man crew on the IHB
Conductor Daniel Sinise on far right; grandfather of actor Gary Sinise

Jack Delano
Mike Evans
1943

Library of Congress



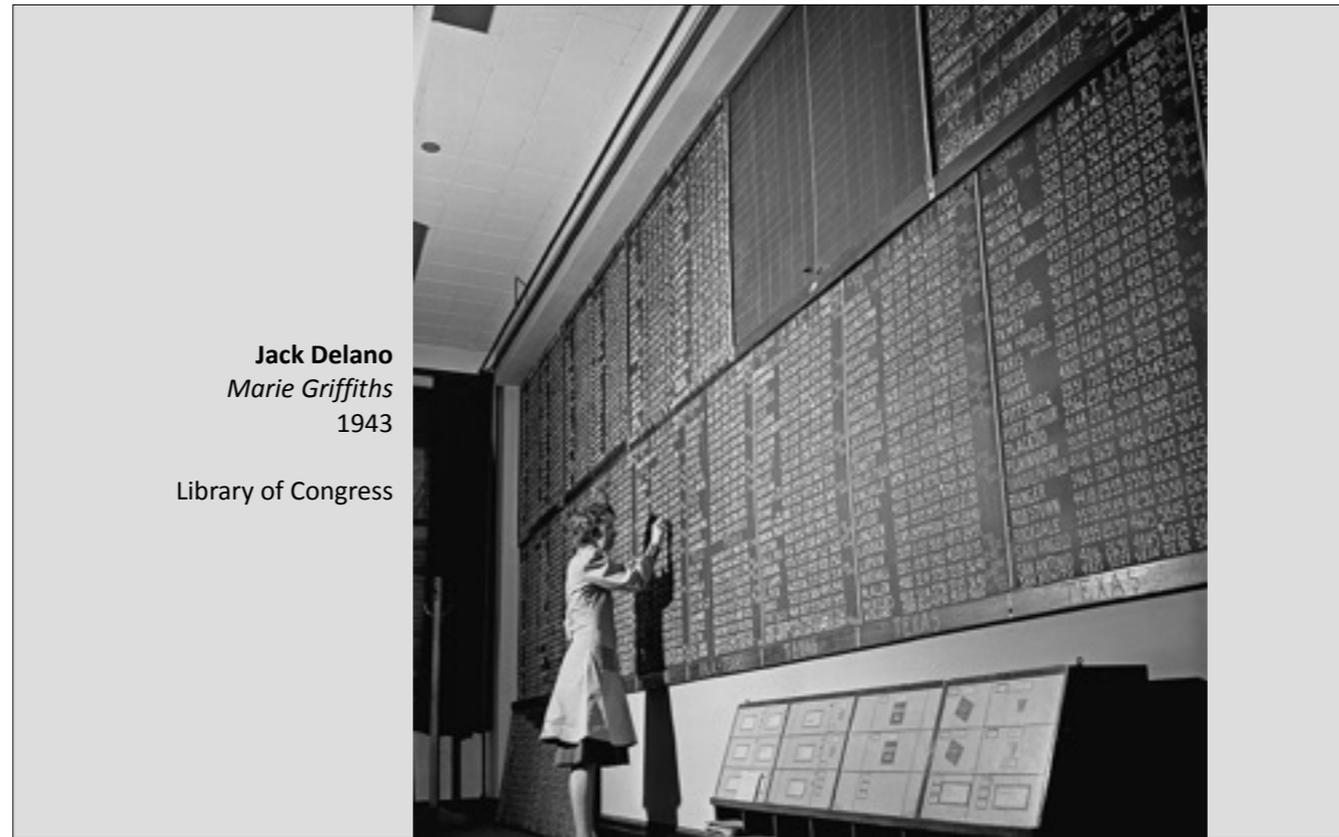
Mike Evans
Welder
C&NW, Proviso



Jack Delano
Dorothy Lucke
1943

Library of Congress

Dorothy Lucke
Engine Wiper
C&NW, Clinton, Iowa



Jack Delano
Marie Griffiths
1943
Library of Congress

Marie Griffiths
Information Room Manager
Chicago Union Station

Story of her scrapbook from Fred Ash

Railroad Photography **POSTWAR**

I want to finish up by spending a little time on photography. First, though, I have to address the distinction we make at the Center between photography and art, as that can invite the question of what is art, and what is not. I want to make clear that I believe some photography achieves the status of art—definitely not all of it, probably not most of it, but some of it certainly does. There's also a lot of photography out there that might not be considered art, but that is still very interesting and valuable. So, by calling ourselves the Center for Railroad Photography & Art, we simply have more latitude in the photography department.



Popularity of postwar photography

Combination of more leisure time, disposable income, ease of travel, better cameras

Robert Witbeck Collection



Eventually, though, these photographers had to come to terms with the end of steam

And many of them did so by hanging up their cameras

Witbeck basically stopped photography



O. Winston Link
Hotshot Eastbound
1956

Link Trust

Most famous of postwar railroad photographers?

Commercial photographer in NYC, devoted 5 years and \$150,000 of his own money (those are 1950s dollars!) to N&W project

Drive-in movie theater
laeger, WV

Link's nephew, in Link's car, with local girl

Image of plane added in darkroom

Zenith of "staged" railroad photography? (Preferred night because he could control the lighting—"I can't move the sun!")

David Plowden
*Central Vermont Railway
Extra 464 North and
Extra 472 South at
Amherst, Massachusetts
1954*



Plowden
Significance

Got started in photography thanks to his love of steam locomotives
Minor White quote

Plowden stopped photographing trains with the end of steam, but he did not stop photography railroads



Railroad in the landscape, particular small towns of prairies

Went onto highly successful photography career, one of the most significant photographers in the U.S.

Lives in Winnetka, great friend to Center, multiple presentations at our conference, these come from 2008



Steinheimer

Thistle, Utah, D&RGW 2-10-2 no. 1403, 1951

Didn't stop after steam!

Jim Shaughnessy
Canadian Pacific double-headed 2-8-2s on freight train
Cookshire, Quebec
February 11, 1956

Collection of the Center
Gift of Aaron Gellman Estate



Neither did Jim Shaughnessy, although steam was his first love



Jim Shaughnessy
Troy, New York
March 1955

Drama of diesel railroading

Troy Union Railroad crossing guard John Moriarity and NYC switch engine during snowstorm

COLLECTIONS

Wallace W. Abbey

Describe Abbey, his collection, our work on it.



Also started with steam...

Santa Fe crossing Illinois River



Lots from Chicago



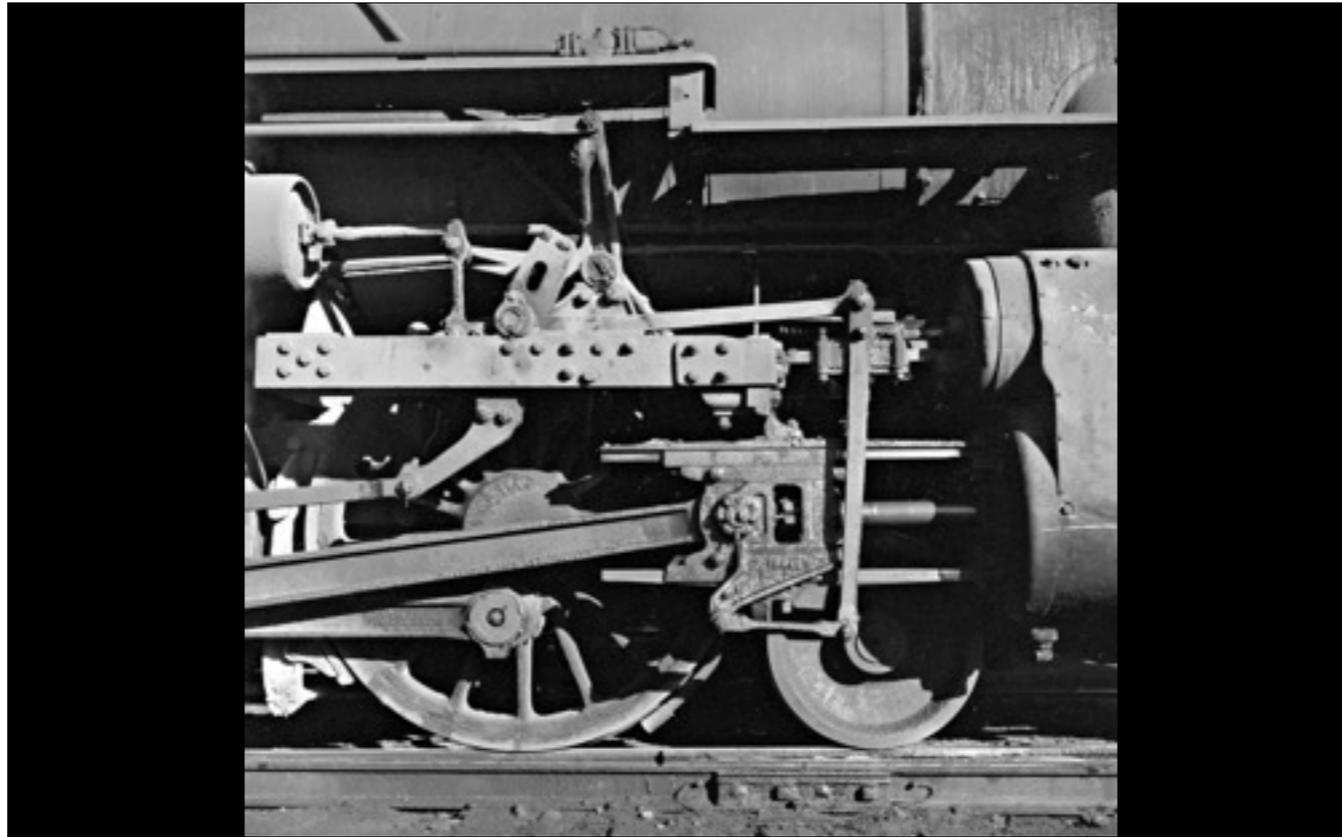












Rolling Power?



CUS



CUS



Dearborn—Wabash



Grand Trunk 4-8-4













LaSalle Street Station, NYC and CRIP



New Mid-Century Empire Builder















MILW Commuter

Tower A-20

1959

Great creativity of B&W photography (darkroom, etc.)

COLLECTIONS

John F. Bjorklund

Describe collection

Significance of amateur collections, and need for good home (but can't take everything)

"Kodachrome" era—benefits and limits (JFB pushed them as much as he could)

Chicago-area selections from his 55,000 slides (all labeled!)

Go quickly!



Dearborn



Dearborn















Lots of processing work (contrast)

Benefits of amateur approach—who else would photograph a C&NW switcher delivering newsprint in downtown Chicago?



JFB did!



Faded ektachromes, digital restoration work:











Dark times for railroading...

Not glamorous, certainly not worthy of corporate photography, but glad that devoted amateurs documented this era—otherwise, we probably wouldn't have a visual record of it!







LaSalle





16th street, approaching Lasalle



Changing city (last JFB image)

Railroad Photography **TODAY**

What's been happening more recently?

Industry has rebounded: deregulation, unit trains, intermodal (you know more about that than I do)

From a photography standpoint though, in many ways it's become less interesting—mergers, homogeneous paint schemes and equipment; streamlining of infrastructure, fewer people, less accessibility

Irony:

As the railroad industry has been losing visual interest, our ability to photograph it has never been better!

Digital cameras and photo editing software brought all of the creative control of the black-and-white darkroom to the disposal of color photography, and today's cameras are almost limitless in what you can photograph



Bloomer, Wisconsin & Northern
Travis Dewitz

Good friend, 2014 presenter

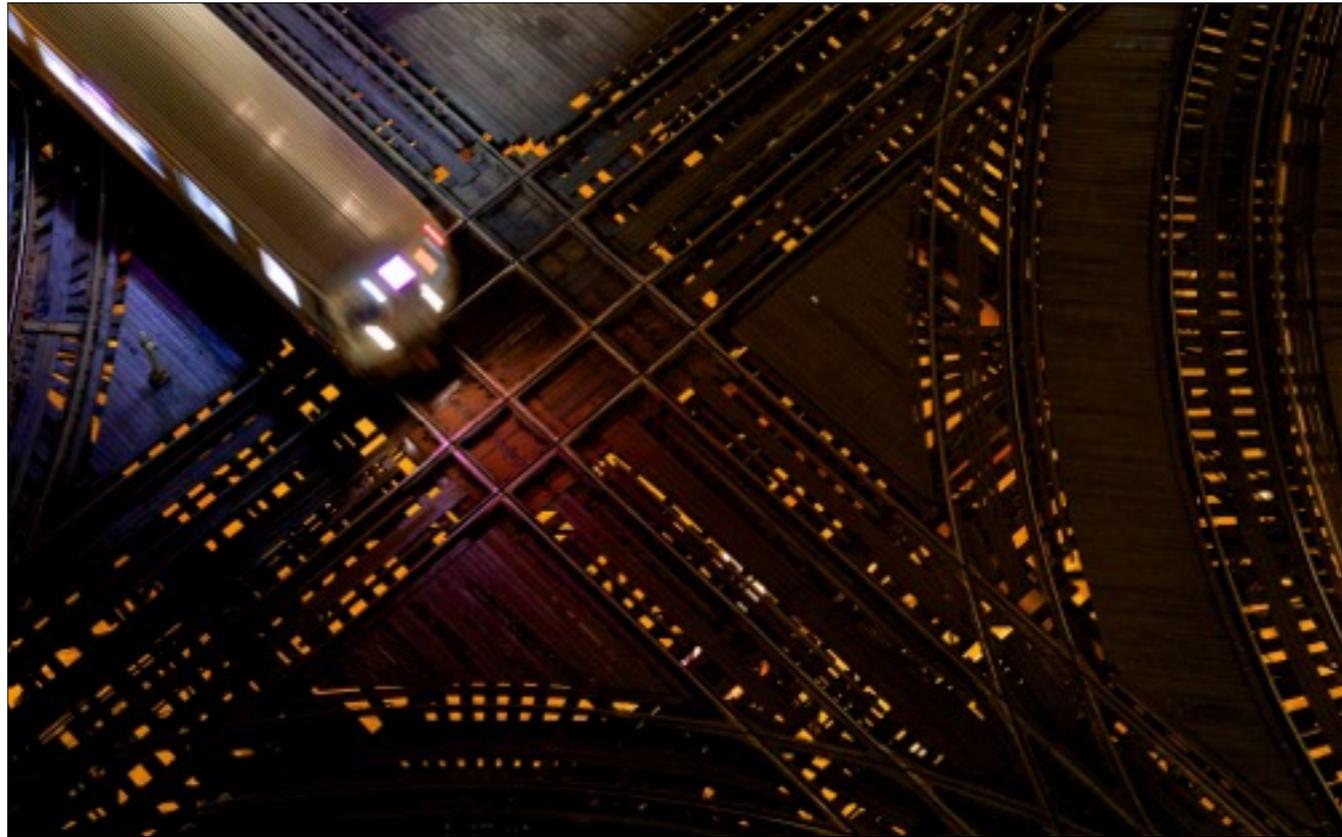


2013 award winner

Ronald Olsen

Steam railroad in a steel mill in China, 2012

Traveling the world in search of interesting imagery



2014 award winner

Eric Williams

Tower 18

Using today's technology to make an interesting image out of an everyday scene



Other modern applications: re-photography

Steve Vandenberg, 2013 conference presenter

Not just empty desert in California's Owens Valley...former right-of-way of SP narrow gauge, which Steve photographed as teenager in the late 1950s

He returned in the early 2000s and lined up his compositions to perfectly match his photographs from half a century earlier.



Archives like the Center's present great opportunities for doing more of this

(Shoutout to Norm and Llanuza, if present)



Other aspects of disappearing infrastructure:

Coaling towers, by board member Jeff Brouws

Typology approach



Art of Place
David Kahler
NS in WV, 1990s, dead of winter
2015 conference presentation
New book later this year

CENTER FOR RAILROAD
PHOTOGRAPHY & ART

www.railphoto-art.org



More of what we do. (Print from Aaron's estate)

If you are a member, thank you!

If you're not, you should be!

\$50, includes four issues, conference discount
Forms (cash/check), Paypal

Questions?