

The Western Reserve Railroad

By: NMRA MCR Division 5
www.mcr5.org

The Western Reserve RR is a fictional railroad representing the Mid-Central Region, Division 5, of the National Model Railroad Association; comprising of Lake, Geauga & Ashtabula Counties in Northeast Ohio. The Division promotes the hobby of model railroading with a traveling modular layout, sponsoring Scout activities, railcars and building kits, and an annual model railroad promotional day in November.

The railroad started in Middlefield Ohio. The track ran West through Burton, then North through Chardon and Painesville. From there it went east along lake Erie, with its terminus in Ashtabula. It also had trackage rights west of Painesville to Mentor and south of Ashtabula in to Jefferson. With the completion to standard gage, the line interchanged in Ashtabula with the New York Central (NYC), and in Middlefield with the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O). Later a spur line was put in place to Scotland, to meet up with the Cleveland Eastern Interurban.

The main traffic on the line was freight, and it was very diverse. There were farm products of wheat, corn, soybeans, milk, grapes, hogs, and sheep. Lumber was handled in various forms from fresh cut timber to finished stock. They also hauled silica sand and coal that was taken from the various mines in the surrounding area. Some of the products freighted in to the region, were salt, ore, chemicals, farm equipment, and rubber.

Passenger traffic was always minimal with just one scheduled run a day in each direction. During the times when the Lake, Geauga, or Ashtabula County Fairs were in swing, it was not uncommon for specials to be added to handle the crowds. The WRR and the interurban also ran to capacity when it was time for special events, such as the Chardon Maple Festival, Burton Apple Butter Festival, or the Fairport Harbor Mardi Gras.

With better roads, truck traffic started to cut into their freight business, Passenger traffic dropped drastically, no longer did people travel via the rails since the automobile was becoming more popular. The WRR rebounded, they retired their steam powered Consolidation's and purchased 2 Electro-Motive Division switchers. These performed adequately for the reduced volume of traffic they now handled. Rubber and plastic industries moved into the area, drawn by lower wages and a ready supply of labor. Most of the rolling stock was replaced with covered hoppers. Passenger cars were disposed of and a small gasoline powered Brill rail bus was bought second hand.

The parent company, MCR, sold the line to a consortium of the Class 1 railroads in the area. Fortunately, the new owners kept the name and it doggedly continues to hang on, but gone forever are the glory days of the steam era.