

**THE SEMAPHORE**  
**CONNEAUT RAILROAD MUSEUM**  
**363 DEPOT ST (PO BOX 643)**  
**CONNEAUT, OH 44030**

**April 2026**

## The Conneaut Railroad Museum

The Conneaut Railroad Museum is operated by the Conneaut Chapter, National Railway Historical Society. The Conneaut Chapter has been determined by the IRS to be a 501(c)3 organization. Museum membership is encouraged at \$15.00 per year; the membership year extends from August 31" to the following August 31". New members joining after January 1st have memberships continue thru August 31" of the following year. Members receive the SEMAPHORE, six times per year, via email.

Contact the Museum with any questions or comments at the email address this issue was received from, or through the PO box above. Articles, photographs, suggestions for topics, etc., from members are most welcome.

Meetings are held monthly at the Museum on the first Monday of each month at 7:00 PM. Please note the time change. Primary goal is to develop Museum plans and activities, taking into account inputs from members attending. If a holiday falls on the first Monday, then the meeting will be on the second Monday. All members are invited and encouraged to attend. If you cannot be there, your inputs are certainly welcome. Meetings during the winter months are subject to weather cancellations.



*Waiting for spring is a  
long slow pain,  
Come spring quickly like  
a train!*

# The President's Letter

Hello to all! The past month has been pretty quiet at the museum. I did have North East Ohio Garage Door Company stop by and make adjustments to the roll up door on the east wall of the building. For years it hasn't been able to remain open on the spring tension. Adjustments were made and it does.

Great Wave Communications recently ran fiber optic cable into the museum. Great Wave provides our telephone service. If and when we opt for Internet service it too will come thru the fiber optic line.

At the last business meeting we met with 2 gentlemen who want to conduct a yard sale on the museum property during the summer to sell off a large cache of HO trains, buildings, and such. They offered to split the proceeds with the museum to which we accepted. Tentative dates were discussed but left open for now.

Lakeshore Primary School has contacted me in regards to once again bring their kindergarten pupils to the museum. This event has been taking place for several years. The agreed upon date will be Friday May 14<sup>th</sup>. We will need volunteers to help staff the museum as well as assist with the event. If you can volunteer that morning please get in contact with us.

Recently member Tony Caruso did some necessary plumbing work in museum's basement. A leaky "T" joint and the faucet attached were replaced. Thanks so much Tony!

This past March 2<sup>nd</sup> Norfolk Southern's Heritage diesel unit, a GE ES44AC, painted in colors representing the former Nickel Plate Road came into Conneaut with freight NS130. It stopped briefly at the yard office for a crew change and then headed east towards Buffalo. I was able to take a video of her coming off the new bridge approaching Woodworth Road crossing. It has been 62 years since the Nickel Plate Road disappeared into the Norfolk & Western Railway now Norfolk Southern. It was great to see this unit on its old home rails again. Here she is below.



**NKP 8100, Woodworth Rd, Conneaut OH.  
Jeff Morrell photos**

## Railroad Medicine, The Conneaut RX: Railroad Doctors

As they coupled cars, served passengers, created steam, and navigated tracks, railroad workers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries didn't give railroad surgeons much thought until they were injured or a family member needed a doctor. Then, they called for their local railroad surgeon and the railroad surgeon faithfully answered the call.

The railroads, including the Nickel Plate Road, The Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railway, and the Bessemer & Lake Erie were the lifeblood of Conneaut but also a source of constant danger. Physicians in this era often had to rush to the scene of accidents; historical records from the late 1800s note that special trains from Conneaut and Erie would carry doctors to wreck sites to provide immediate care to injured engineers and passengers.

The railroads hired doctors as railroad doctors or surgeons more out of self-preservation than selflessness. Danger stalked railroad workers and passengers as relentlessly as steam from a steam engine floated ahead of the train chugging down the tracks. As the ranks of railroad workers, railroads and railroad accidents grew alongside each other, the railroads acted. They hired railroad doctors/surgeons.

Conneaut railroad doctors made up a small percentage of railroad doctors. These Conneaut and cooperating Ashtabula County doctors included Dr. John Venen, Conneaut's first doctor who practiced in Conneaut for decades; Dr. David Webster Raymond; Dr. Greenleaf Fifield; Dr. Amos Fifield; Dr. William Leet; and Dr. George Cole from Conneaut.

Dr. G.W. Raymond graduated from Fairfield Medical College in New York in June 1833 and came to Rome in Ashtabula County, Ohio for a short time before he came to Conneaut in November 1833 and entered a partnership with Dr. Greenleaf Fifield. In July 1839, Dr. Raymond went into practice for himself and doctored people throughout Ashtabula County as well as doctoring railroad people.

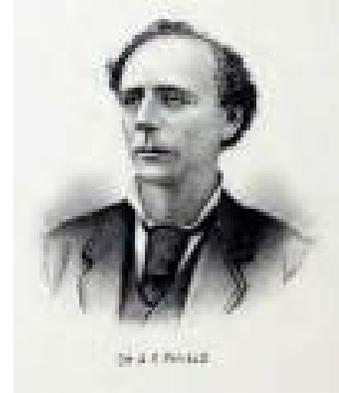
Many local doctors of the time had graduated from Western Reserve Medical College in Cleveland or Starling Medical College in Columbus, Ohio. Their biographies don't always record that the doctors were railroad doctors, but their historical era and location in Conneaut and Ashtabula County are circumstantial evidence that most of them doctored for the railroad as part of their practices. This was especially true in Conneaut when The Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railway extended service to Conneaut around 1852, and thirty years later when the Nickel Plate Railroad established its shops in the village in 1882 to serve as a major repair site for Nickel Plate Railroad steam locomotives. When the Civil War swept over the country, both North and



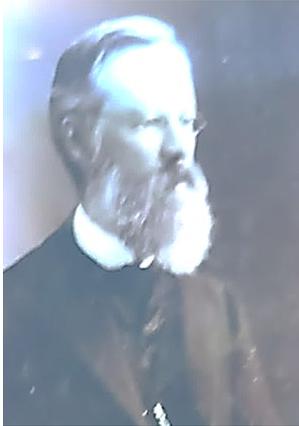
South gradually realized that railroads would play a pivotal part in transporting supplies and troops as well as rolling hospitals.



Dr. Greenleaf Fifield and his son, Dr. Amos Fifield practiced in Conneaut for decades and Dr. Amos Fifield was a surgeon for the 29<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War and for the Nickel Plate Railroad as well.



Dr. Wadsworth Arvin Ward graduated from Western Reserve Medical College in Cleveland in 1861. After he graduated, he went to Monroe, Ohio, and practiced medicine for three years. After that, he entered the Army hospital service and during the winter of 1864-1865 he was in Little Rock, Arkansas.



When Dr. Ward mustered out of the Army, he located in Conneaut in 1865 and established a large and lucrative practice. He was a surgeon for the Nickel Plate Railroad and for several insurance companies.

After the Civil War, labor unrest and concerns about liability motivated the railroads to organize and formalize their medical arrangements. Depending on finances and geography, railroads roughly organized their medical arrangements in three ways. With an almost total lack of medical facilities, western railroads developed employee funded hospital organizations. Eastern railroads adopted an organization model around a salaried chief surgeon and hired local physicians as caregivers. Most of the railroad doctors in Conneaut

worked under this plan.

In the 1880s, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad pioneered the third organizational model when it created a beneficial society that awarded injured workers medical care and compensation. Railroad doctors also formed their own organizations, including the National Association of Railway Surgeons, in the 1880s, where they discussed problems of professionalization and medical issues.

Railroads were also early pioneers in preventative medicine as they continually had to deal with increasing costs and labor turnover. Some railroads provided smallpox and typhoid vaccinations, held malaria prevention campaigns, improved passenger car sanitation, mandated physical examinations for their employees, and gave them first aid training. By 1914, railroad medical organizations were providing care to approximately two million employees and about ten percent of all doctors. In the 1890s, Conneaut and its railroads continued to expand and so did the medical practice of Dr. George Henry Cole of Conneaut. George graduated from Cleveland Medical College in 1892 at age 40

He settled in Conneaut where he established a medical practice and later founded a private hospital. He also worked as a surgeon and health office for The New York Central Railroad for thirty years from the 1890s to the 1920s

World War I brought about modern improvements in patient care on hospital or ambulance trains. Converted commuter trains, they featured sixteen carriages and measured one third of a mile long. They contained wards, operating rooms, pharmacies, and kitchens and could accommodate up to 599 patients. These hospital trains were essential medical mobile units transporting millions of wounded soldiers to base hospitals.



Dr. Cole with his daughters Mabel and Maude.



Dr. William Leet was a lieutenant colonel in the medical corps during World War I. He had graduated from the medical department of Western Reserve University in Cleveland in 1895 and was commissioned a captain in the medical corps and later promoted to lieutenant colonel. He spent a year in France and after serving 26 months returned to the United States. Dr. Leet practiced in Conneaut during the last half of the 19th century and served as a railroad surgeon for the Nickel Plate Railroad.



Dr. Harold Wilson practiced in Conneaut for 43 years and established an outstanding record of service. The Pittsburgh Steamship Company appointed him as its first chief surgeon. In addition to his service to the Steamship Company, Dr. Wilson also served as chief surgeon for the Pittsburgh and Conneaut Dock Companies and the Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad for 39 years.



Continuing their tradition of excellence, railroad doctors in World War II transferred their specialized training treating severe trauma like broken limbs, burns, and amputations to battlefield medicine. They pioneered trauma care, infection control, and portable surgical kits. These innovations helped develop mobile surgical units and modern hospital train systems, including Conneaut doctors like Dr. Irving L. Rosenberg, Dr. John H. Mowry, and Dr. Clarence T. Risley. Dr. Mowry served in the United States Army from 1942 to 1945 and Dr. Clarence T.

Risley 's tour of duty lasted from 1942 to 1946, After the war, they returned to Conneaut and established private practices.



Dr. Irving L. Rosenberg

Dr. Rosenberg attended Muskingum College in New Concord, Ohio, and graduated from Duke University School of Medicine in 1941. After serving in the U.S. Navy Medical Corps during World War II, he began his family practice in Conneaut, OH, and later in Hendersonville, NC.

Key aspects of Dr. Rosenberg's career and community involvement in Conneaut include his medical practice. He was a family practitioner and later became a board certified anesthesiologist. A member of the Masonic Lodge in Conneaut, he became a 32<sup>nd</sup> degree mason.

Along with their appointed doctors, the railroads established approximately 35 dedicated railroad hospitals that provided over 3,700 beds for railroad employes across the United States. These hospitals including the Southern Pacific Hospital in San Francisco and other hospitals in cities such as Chicago and St. Louis. Railroad hospital associations often ran these hospitals which were ancestors of corporate prepaid healthcare.

Opened in 1919, Conneaut's Brown Memorial Hospital did not have the title of railroad hospital although its history is woven into Conneaut's robust railroad history. Brown Memorial Hospital provided a community hospital treating both industrial and railroad related injuries along with other illnesses.



Brown Memorial Hospital

In 1882, shortly after the Ashtabula train disaster, Ashtabula citizens established a small emergency hospital. In that same year, the wives and mother of Ashtabula railroad workers founded the Ladies Railroad Auxiliary. Conneaut ladies immediately founded a /Conneaut chapter, inspired by the economic growth that the Bessemer and Lake Erie, the Nickel Plate, and the Lakeshore and Michigan Southern Railroads had brought to their town.

The ladies in the Ladie's Railroad Auxiliary of Conneaut supported their family railroad workers and the hospital by molding gauze for bandages and sewing sheets, pillowcases, gowns and towels for the hospital and other organizations that needed them. They served as caregivers for injured and ill patients and organized fund raisers for the hospital.

Like steam engines and railroad cabooses, the railroad doctor/surgeon era didn't end in one mile-long, loud mournful whistle, but instead faded over several decades. Modern public health systems, private insurance, and improved rail safety made the separate identity of railroad doctors obsolete and by mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, they were absorbed into general medical practice. The Ladie's Railroad Auxiliaries transformed into hospital auxiliaries, and the hospitals grew from family homesteads like Brown Memorial Hospital into medical complexes. Railroad tracks, although fewer in number, still guide trains with one-mile long, loud mournful whistles.