

A LOOK AT THE TRAINS THAT RAN THROUGH ZACHOW

SHAWANO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ZACHOW HISTORIC COMMITTEE

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The last freight train that ran through Zachow was the east bound WUGBA manifest train on August 12, 1993. The last passenger train passed through Zachow on April 30, 1971. This train stopped at Shawano and was the Flambeau 400. The first train that ran through the platted Village of Zachow would have been in 1906.

The trains that ran through Zachow can be broken down into several categories. The first breakdown would be freight versus passenger and the second would be steam versus diesel.

FREIGHT SERVICE:

The initial use of rails in Zachow was for hauling freight and cattle to and from Zachow. In the period from 1906 to the late 1940s a number of businesses were supported by rail. The “commercial siding” was always busy with freight being unloaded or loaded. The following were the most active customers:

*Pauly & Pauly Cheese Co. graded cheese that came into Zachow from a number of the local creameries via horse and wagon and later by truck. This cheese was then carried by rail to Green Bay to the company's main location.

*Bryzinski Brothers pickle house used rail in the early days to move pickles grown locally to a pickle processing plant believed to be in Krakow. In the later 30s and the early 40s this shipping was handled by truck.

*Zachow Elevator and Lumber received grain and seed shipments and also received lumber shipments.

*Westerfeld Oil initially received their gasoline and fuel oil via rail so tank cars were a common sight.

It is said that in the very early 1900s that a “Beet Shipping” business operated from this site.

*Radtke's Garage also used the freight service to deliver tractors by rail in the 30s and 40s.

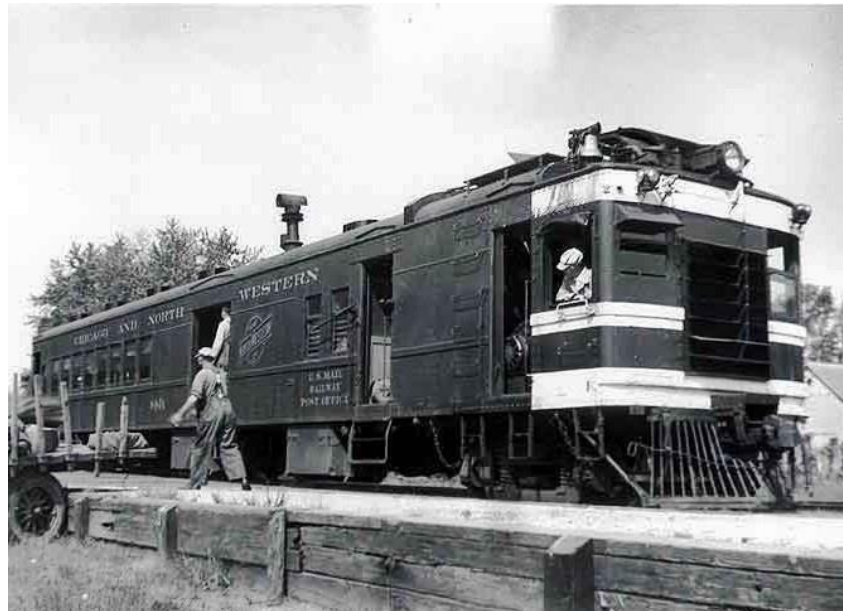
With the improvement in roads and the building of the interstate highway system in the 1950s all these businesses came to rely on trucking to handle their needs and rail was gradually phased out.



Typical Class R1 freight engine with a very small manifest in the 1940s

PASSENGER SERVICE:

The only passenger service for Zachow was by what folks called the “Doodlebug” or the “Puddle-Jumper.” This was a gasoline/electric train with red and white stripes on the front. It consisted of one car with the cab in front and then a baggage/mail area, and a small passenger compartment in the rear. Sometimes with a “full” passenger load this train pulled one separate passenger car. There were two “Doodlebugs” that ran from Green Bay to Ashland, Wisconsin, and back providing both a west bound train and an east bound train on the same day. The afternoon east bound train was called the “Express.” They were numbered 116 and 117. This service was active in the 30s and early 40s and delivered the mail from Green Bay to Zachow in the morning around 9:30 AM on the way to Ashland. Many folks in Zachow became dependent on this train since they could catch the morning train going west and go to Shawano to shop and then catch the afternoon east bound train from Shawano to return to Zachow in late afternoon. When this service was cancelled in the late 40s it caused a major disruption in the local shopping habits since many of the folks had no other means by which to go to Shawano to shop. The mail to Zachow was converted to truck delivery and pickup like the other businesses in town.



The C&NW Gas-Electric “Doodlebug”

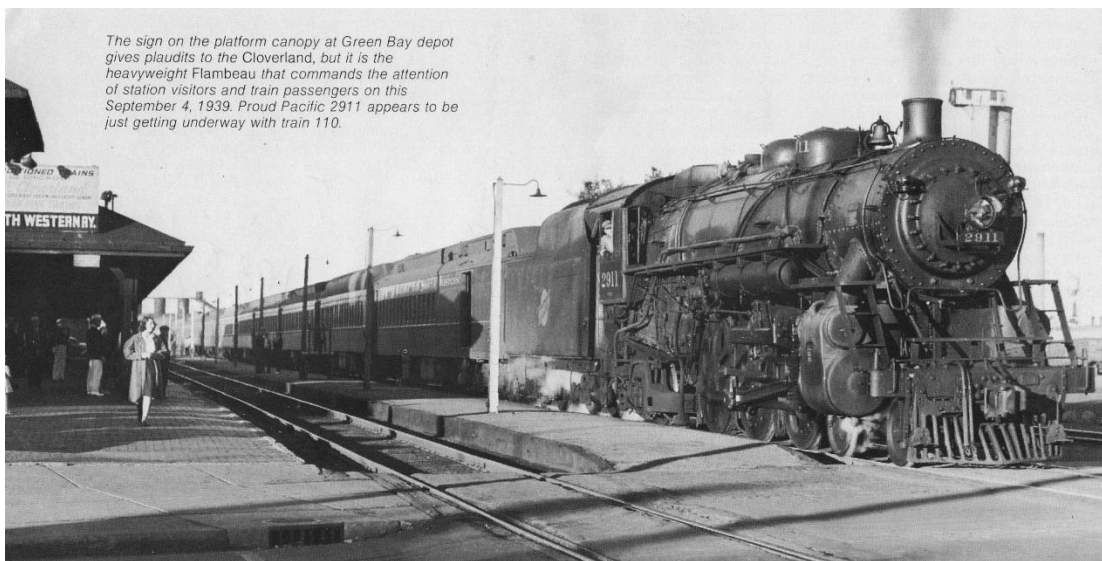
Two more significant passenger trains went through Zachow on their way from Green Bay to Ashland and back. One was called the Ashland Limited and the other was called the Flambeau or Flambeau “400” depending on the year. These were high speed trains that ran at 70+ miles per hour. Many of the passengers in the summer were headed for northern Wisconsin for the summer. Shawano was the nearest regular stop of these trains for the people in Zachow. The trains would discharge passengers in the non-regular stop stations upon request. This happened to me in the mid 50s when they let me get off in Zachow rather than Shawano. This allowed me to walk the 200 feet to my home. These fast trains passed through Zachow in late afternoon and again around 1:00 AM.

STEAM RAIL & DIESEL RAIL:

The transition to diesel was first noted by the folks in Zachow with the freight trains. This occurred in the late 1940s when an occasional freight diesel would show up leading its chain of freight cars. This was a welcome transition for the housewives of Zachow in that they no longer had to fear for the cleanliness of their laundry that had been put on a line to dry. The steam powered freight trains that

were west bound belched out huge quantities of black smoke and soot as they powered up the long up-hill grade coming into Zachow from Green Bay.

The steam powered passenger trains were equally messy but were awesome to watch as they climbed the grade referred to above. However they were traveling at speeds up to 70+ miles an hour as they passed through Zachow so the soot they generated did not last long. The passenger engines were the E-2 4-6-2 PACIFICS with three high wheel drivers on each side to pull a consist of the heavyweight Pullman passenger cars in the early years and a mix of heavy and lightweight cars in the later years.



The sign on the platform canopy at Green Bay depot gives plaudits to the Cloverland, but it is the heavyweight Flambeau that commands the attention of station visitors and train passengers on this September 4, 1939. Proud Pacific 2911 appears to be just getting underway with train 110.

Flambeau, before the Flambeau "400" designation, in Green Bay, WI

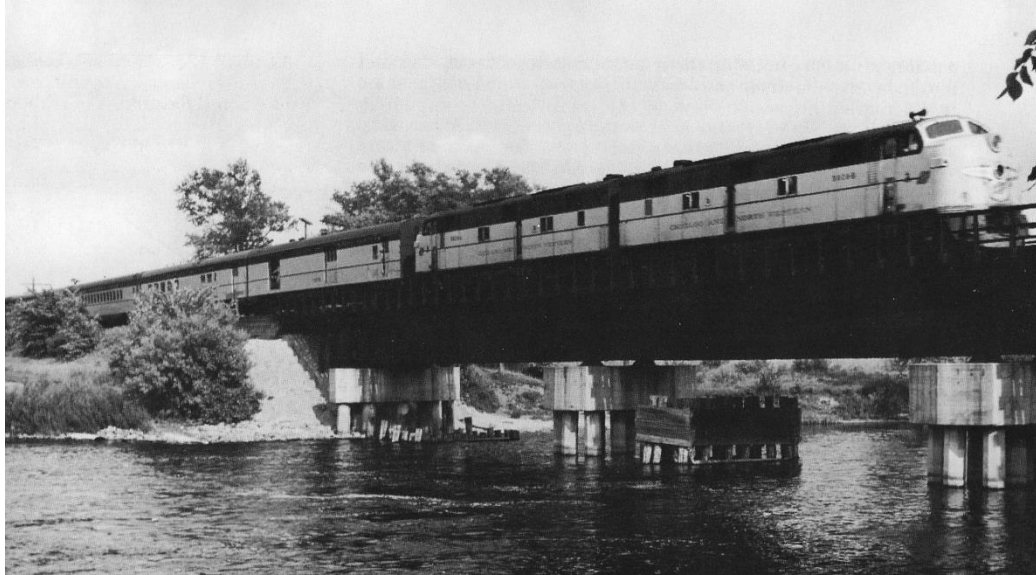
Circa 1939

The first passenger diesel was more noteworthy. (They were prettier with the green and yellow color scheme on the engines and lightweight cars.) This drew many of the people of Zachow out of their beds for a viewing of the first west bound diesel as it passed through town at around 1:00 AM. The class E engines and cars were beautiful in their yellow and green paint scheme. It is believed that this west bound train went through Zachow on May 26th 1950 since on May 27th 1950 Dave Winter, the Mayor of Shawano, cut the ribbon in the late afternoon on the first east bound Flambeau "400."



Mayor Dave Winter cutting ribbon

A detailed history of the 400s in THE 400 STORY by Jim Scribbins in 1982 is the source of this photo. This book is available for review in the Sikora Center.



**The Flambeau 400 crossing the bridge over the Wolf river in Shawano on June 11, 1950
The engine is an E7 5020 with both A & B units.**

POSTSCRIPT:

The C&NW tested their steam engines by making a run from Green Bay to Zachow. This was convenient for the test crew in that they could frequent the adult beverage establishments while part of the crew checked things over on the engine. It also permitted many of the kids in town to get to know the engineers and get a close look at a steam engine. This eventually resulted in a couple of us begging rides on the engine. Eventually this wish was granted. Typically the ride would be from Zachow to the first crossing a mile east of town. We would then walk back to town. The magnificence of this to a small boy cannot be overstated. The wheeze-wheeze-wheeze of the idle steam engine was great as was the chug-chug-chug as the engine started. We felt the wind from the movement and the heat of the fire box. "Heady stuff" for a young boy.

The trains also gave the dogs in town something to bark at. They never accepted the presence of these "belching" mechanical demons.

With the trains that routinely came through town one of the activities for some of the kids was to put pennies on the track to see how large they could get with the train's wheels flattening them out. Eventually they would get so thin they would stick to the wheels and either be worn off or they would drop off thereby being lost.

When there were box cars on the siding this provided a great place to climb around. In the refrigerated cars we could open up the "hatch" on top of the car to "check the ice level" and other important inspections. Another playground was the stockyard that was really not operating in the late 30s anymore but all the buildings and fencing were still there to poke around in and climb on.

You could hear the west bound freight trains when they were miles away as they struggled to make it up the grade to the Zachow area. When their wheels would lose traction on the tracks you could hear the steady chug----- chug-----chug----- chug change to “chugachugachugachugachuga” until the wheels would again regain their grip and the sound would go back to the steady chug----- chug chug----- chug.

In spite of the noise of the many trains that went through Zachow and the mess the steam engines would make from time to time the switch to diesel was ultimately a let-down. Diesel was prettier but did not have the majesty of the steam power trains.

In addition to the trains the Depot was also an attraction for the kids. There was always something to look at, learn about, and just listen to. The telegraph traffic was always filling the depot with its clackety-clackety sound as messages were going to the various depots and sometimes to Zachow. The various agents always seemed to welcome the kids although I am sure we were pests at times.

LAST TRAIN THROUGH ZACHOW:



The last train through Zachow was an east bound freight that is passing over the railroad trestle west of Zachow on August 12, 1993. The last “400” passenger train passed this same way on April 30, 1971

So it ends!

By Dean D Proper. Zachow Historic Committee-SCHS
March 2017

Source of information and pictures:

- *"Train Life" magazine
- *"The 400 Story" by Jim Scribbins
- *"Steam Power" by C.T. Knudsen
- * Lawrence A. Gueller
- *Chicago & North Western Historical Society
- *Shawano County Historical Society