



Reflections of a River Rat:

Crazy train? Nope, going off the rails for two little red cabooses

Two red cabooses would be rare enough in a modern railroad yard, given that they are a relic of bygone days. But when you spot them in someone's lawn along Route 58, between Morristown and Edwardsville, you are left wondering.



Why? How did they get there? Who collects railroad cars?

It's no mystery, just a passion for two retirees, contractor Wayne Latham and nurse Clara Jane Warren. If you wander through their yard, you'll can't miss the cabooses resting on their own siding. Train memorabilia dots the landscape and they have built a replica of the Morristown railroad depot that was razed in 1964.

"This is a passion and it has been a fun adventure and a joy to see our friends, neighbors and visitors enjoy it with us," said Warren, who served as a bus driver for generations of Morristown schoolchildren before she switched to nursing in 1997.

Latham developed a fondness for trains at his childhood home near Syracuse.

"When I was a boy, my dad had a large, 8-foot by 16-foot, model train set in our basement, and that inspired me and my interest in railroads," he said.

Some people collect garden gnomes, metal sculptures, even pink flamingoes. But 15 years ago, Latham had his eye on a 1912 New York Central Railroad caboose.



Wayne Latham stands with the Grand Trunk Western Railway caboose, dating to 1923, and the New York Central caboose, at rear, which was built in 1912.

“It was for sale at an auction, needed repair and I thought it would make a good guest house, so I bought it,” Latham said.

The cupola was removed so the caboose would fit under the railroad bridge along the Canton-Potsdam road, then refitted upon delivery by flatbed trailer to 9264 State Route 58.

Latham was further inspired in 2010 to build a replica of Morristown’s New York Central depot adjacent to his caboose.

The New York Central passenger line operated in the area from 1875 to 1961. The cars boarded in Syracuse, passed through Hammond, Brier Hill and Morristown, then stopped at their terminus in Ogdensburg. The last southbound train from Ogdensburg left the station at 6:25 p.m. Sunday, May 22, and made its last stop in Morristown.

That station sat along the St. Lawrence River behind what is now Ella’s Restaurant. During its heyday, it was a busy hub with the Comstock Hotel and Dr. Morse’s Indian Root Pills factory just a stone’s throw away. The Morristown-Brockville ferry was in operation too.



Wayne Latham and his crew built a replica of the Morristown train depot that was razed in 1964.

But after the last train passed, the station was razed by Al and Dick Bogardus and their crew, and the tracks had been torn out. Latham managed to keep some of the original wood, then incorporated it into his replica. It is 40 feet shorter than the original station because the freight room was eliminated.

Latham and Warren weren't done with their collection. In 2015, they acquired a 1923 Grand Trunk Western Railroad caboose that had been in operation in Canada. It was serving as a summer cottage along the St. Lawrence in the area of the Perry Road. It was moved by tractor trailer flatbed to the Route 58 property and positioned with a crane.

It wasn't the first sighting of a caboose in that area. The

original NYC tracks from Brier Hill passed by Warren and Latham's property and entered the village of Morristown from the southern end, where the Route 37 bypass was built in the 1960s. Trains moved down along the bay to the station, then past Wright's Marina and Terrace Park into Ogdensburg.

Cabooses had been placed at the end of trains until the 1980s when regulations were relaxed. Cabooses were replaced by smaller EOT (end of train) units that monitored train's brake systems and were fitted with blinking lights to signify the end of the train.

Latham's and Warren's cabooses dates to the grand age of passenger travel. Cabooses served as dormitories and were outfitted with potbellied stoves,

iceboxes, bunks and toilets for the workers, always men. They were strategically



Train workers would sit in the loft of the caboose and watch for overheating wheel bearings.

placed at the train's end as a safety measure. When the train entered a long curve, the watchmen in the cupolas had a great vantage point to spot smoke from overheated wheel bearings. Those required stopping the train for quick repairs so the wheels wouldn't be damaged, or worse, spark a fire.

Latham credited a memorable trip to Hudson Bay with his father for sealing his love of trains.

"We went to Ontario, Canada and rode the Ontario Northland Railroad to Moosonee Station. It stopped along the way and picked up native passengers with furs. They were taking them to Moosonee Station to trade them. It was a very hot day but the next day there were snow flurries."

Warren and Latham said they remain open to visitors, and would welcome school groups as did they before the pandemic.

"This is a way to preserve our history and teach our youth about the evolution of transportation," Warren said. "We welcome everyone that asks to see this."

Jim Holleran, a Morristown native, is a retired teacher and registrar for the Rochester City School District, and former sports editor of the Democrat and Chronicle. Reach him at jimholleran29@gmail.com or view past columns under "Reflections of River Rat" at <https://hollerangetsitwrite.com/blog/>