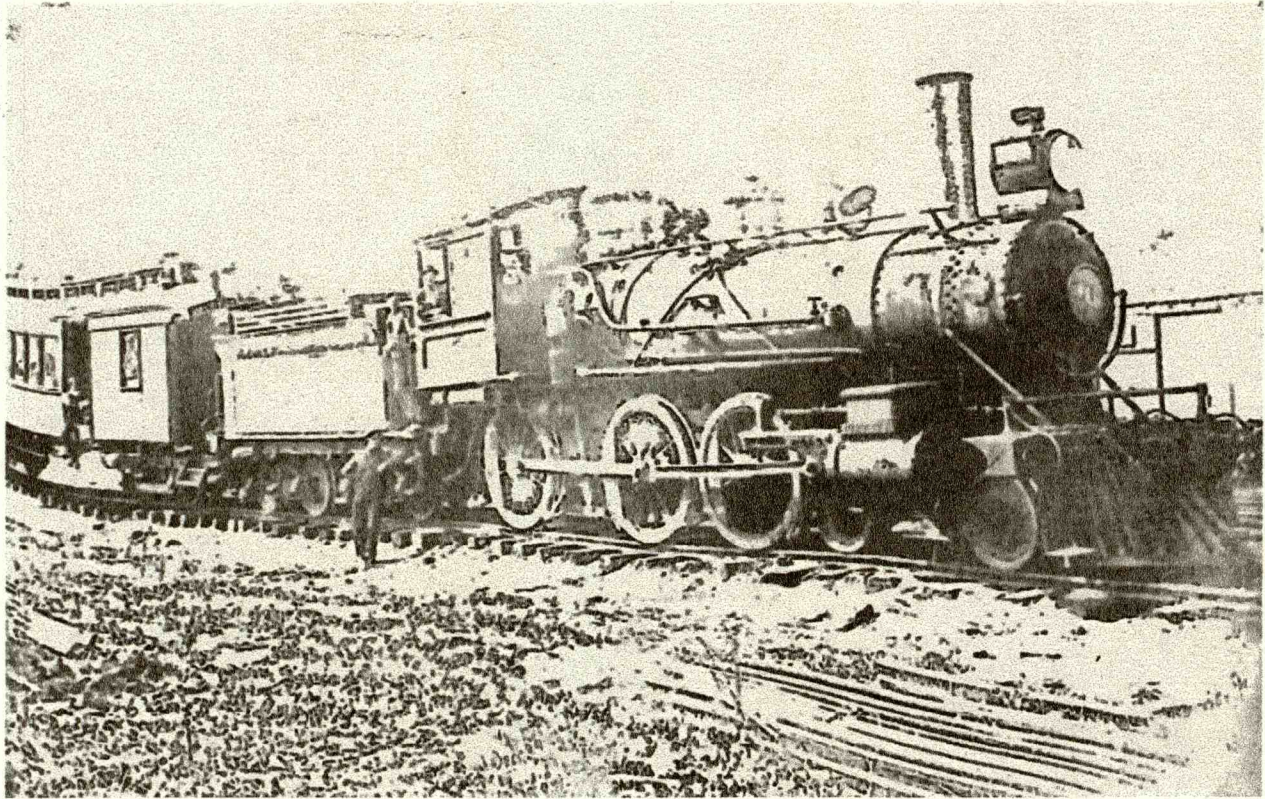


Record Setting Ettrick & Northern Railroad Fails



Ettrick & Northern 10 (engine built 1890's) and combination coach 100. Crew members, May 10, 1919
 Engineer – Frank Wall, Conductor – Henry Kroll and Brakeman – Palmer Peterson

the first railroad to enter Trempealeau County, the Ettrick and Northwestern, crossed the Mississippi River through the Village of Trempealeau, MN, and LaCrosse Wisconsin, and beyond. Galesville

promoters succeeded in getting a branch line established to their village in 1883. The Galesville to Trempealeau train called at one time, "Old Betsy" and by others the "Galesville Scott" - made four trips daily and was apparently a success financially. But the

Chicago and Northwestern could not be persuaded to extend a branch line up Beaver Creek to Ettrick. Ettrick's location proved to be a disadvantage and highways bypassed Ettrick as well.

Farmers had a marketing

disadvantage and were forced to haul their produce a greater distance overland to Blair, Galesville or Arcadia by plodding horses over muddy and sandy roads to these outlets. But - the Scotch, Irish and Scandinavian farmers who settled this region

developed a prosperous agricultural community among the hills and valleys around Beaver Creek and they decided to do something about building their own railroad.

Hopes ran high encouraging the writers of the 1917 Trempealeau County History Book to end their section on railroads with the optimistic prediction of the Ettrick and Northern's future.

On June 5, 1915, the Northern Railroad Co. was incorporated with financial support from local farmers and businessmen it would serve.

The town bonded itself for \$100,000 and private parties invested heavily. H. F. Clausen, Ettrick banker, was a promoter. Other members of the corporation were: Tom Whalen, A. G. Hagestad, A. J. Ekern, Ed Quammen, Fred Fillner and Pete Corcoran to name a few and 700 other farmers and businessmen were involved.

The decision to lay the track along a route from Ettrick to Blair over the formidable dividing ridge was the first and fatal flaw in the construction of the Ettrick and Northern Railroad. This would connect with Green Bay and Western instead of the Chicago and Northwestern who refused to extend service in the beginning. It was a mistake, the path along Beaver Creek to Galesville would have been shorter and easier.

The deadline for completion of the Ettrick and Northern was January 1, 1918. Failure meant default of the \$100,000 bonds. It seemed long enough at the time but -

Ten bridges needed to be built and construction of two large fills, one 25 feet deep and over 200 feet

Ettrick area residents can still be reminded of their remarkable railroad heritage by some physical remnants. A snowmobile trail uses the somewhat-filled-in Blair Ridge cut and approaches. The depot serves as a storage facility, and the engine house has been converted into apartments. And several lengths of the roadbed remain visible between Ettrick and Blair.⁴⁸

Etrick & Northern

cont.

in length needed to be completed. But, the greatest obstacle was the enormous cut over 100 feet long by 90 feet deep that needed to be dug, mostly by pick and shovel through the Blair ridge. It was at this cut reputed to be the deepest railroad cut in the state that the project nearly failed and faltered.

It was the cut on the ridge between Etrick and Blair through solid rock and constant cave-ins that nearly broke the hearts of the workmen. A human life was sacrificed. Herman Noren of Franklin was hit by a steam shovel bucket and was killed.

U.S. was suddenly in World War I and prices of steel and other commodities soared - besides a severe drain on the manpower available.

So farmers and businessmen voluntarily turned out to complete the railroad. Even those who had no money in it helped. They worked holidays and Sundays.

The women supplied coffee and meals and many donned overalls and helped with pick and shovel.

The effort was a success and four days before the deadline on December 27, 1917, the Blair Press reported - "At last the Etrick and Northern Railroad is a fact. Today the rails were laid into the Etrick village and the first train made its entry."

The Galesville Republican reported in the winter of 1918 that passenger service will no doubt be established before spring, but it was not until fall that the goal was reached.

When service began in October, 1918, no bands played, no large crowds turned out and nobody made a speech. Not only was Herman Noren's life lost, but construction costs reportedly totaled over \$300,000. There was a round house on some farm near Etrick, a pumping station (still in use here for a garage), and a depot next to this building. There was never enough money to build a turntable, therefore for many years the train was forced to back up on its return trip from Blair, a situation which normally interfered very little with the operation of the line.

Then on a bitter December night in 1926 when Engineer Frank Wall was backing the train up the hill to the Blair Ridge on its return trip to Etrick, the tender struck an ice encrusted cattle guard, broke its coupling with the engine and tumbled into the coulee. Fortunately for the crew, the weight of "Old No. Ten" kept it on the tracks and no lives were lost. But - already operating in receivership, the company had no funds to raise and repair the tender. So this marked an end to the operation, six unfruitful years.

Shortly after the accident the Etrick and Northern was put up for auction and sold to the New Brunswick Iron and Wrecking Co.

The wreck ended the early phase of the operation, but did not end the story of the railroad. It was revived under new management with a slightly changed name - The Etrick Railroad Company.

Around 1927, Maurice Casey, father to Mrs. Victor Folkedahl of Etrick, who had the Ford dealership business in Etrick became deeply involved. He was a stockholder in the old Etrick and Northern Railroad and had operated the line for a year while it was in receivership. He decided to buy it. He tried to negotiate with junk dealers, but it was again put up for auction this time at West Salem. The only other bidder was a man from New York who after visiting Etrick thought it would be a good investment.

As the story goes the New Yorker and Maurice Casey mutually recognizing that their competitive bidding might drive up the price far beyond its actual worth, came to an agreement before the auction which would

allow ownership to be decided by chance.

Before leaving Etrick the following was agreed upon: First, that the right of the opening bid would be decided by chance, in this case by lagging-up, hand over hand, on a baseball bat; second, that they would then alternate bids until they were the only bidders left; third, that as soon as all the other bidders had been eliminated they would stop bidding no matter who held the final bid; fourth, that they would then return to Etrick to determine actual ownership - again by chance and last, that the final owner of the railroad would pay the loser \$500 to cover time and expenses.

Once in West Salem, the New Yorker, having won the first chance, catching the bat, made the opening bid. The bidding then alternated back and forth until all other bidders had dropped out. Mr. Casey was at that time holding the top bid, but the New Yorker in a moment of excited forgetfulness jumped the bid another \$100. When reminded of their "understanding" however, he stopped bidding and agreed that he would cover this last \$100 as it amounted to an unnecessary extra expense.

They returned to Etrick to decide ownership of the railroad by the toss of a silver dollar on the floor of Casey's garage (the old white building still standing as you enter the village of Etrick). They persuaded a young man from Illinois that happened to be there to toss the coin. A chalk circle was drawn and the coin tossed. The New Yorker called heads; the six judges agreed it landed tails. So, Mr. Casey became the new owner of the Etrick and Northern Railroad for the sum of \$7,000. Casey gave the New Yorker the agreed upon \$500 for time and travel expenses - but he immediately returned \$100 of it for overbidding at the West Salem auction.

On April 19, 1929, formal ownership was transferred to Casey. He later sold part interest to Obel Pederson.

Extensive repairs needed to be made before it could resume operation. 5,000 new ties needed to be laid, bridges had to be repaired and shale had to be hauled to widen and fill washed out sections of the road bed. A crew of ten to fourteen men including Chas. Sherwood, Roy Ekern, Lee Olson, Vincent Beirne, Kenneth Pederson, John Amoth, Sydney Briggs, Jennings Johnson, Homer Mattson and Arnold Folkedahl, who drove spikes; under foremanship of Emil Erickson was employed for most of the summer of 1928. A turntable was constructed. The company bought a new diesel Brookline engine. Other equipment included a cattle car, a flat car and a Ford truck with a trailer on steel wheels for small loads.

At first the railroad made two runs daily to Blair. High school students rode. For a short period mail was hauled. Even livestock, 11 carloads in one train load or pickle (cucumber) vats. Reports from folks, youngsters back then, include that kids from Blair would jump on the train and get off when it slowed up (something their parents didn't know about); one Halloween a group of kids from Etrick unhooked the truck and went to Blair-surprising they weren't all killed; a big group rode on the flat car to celebrate the 4th of July in Blair, there being a depot at Beaches Corner.

Later the railroad made only one run. Shipments of lumber, livestock and oil generated most of the revenue. Little money was made in the venture and less than ten years after it was revived, approval of abandonment of the line was granted by the Interstate Commerce Commission - just four months after the town board made its final payment on the bonds of 1915. When the opportunity presented itself the railway and its rolling stock were sold to a Michigan mining firm.

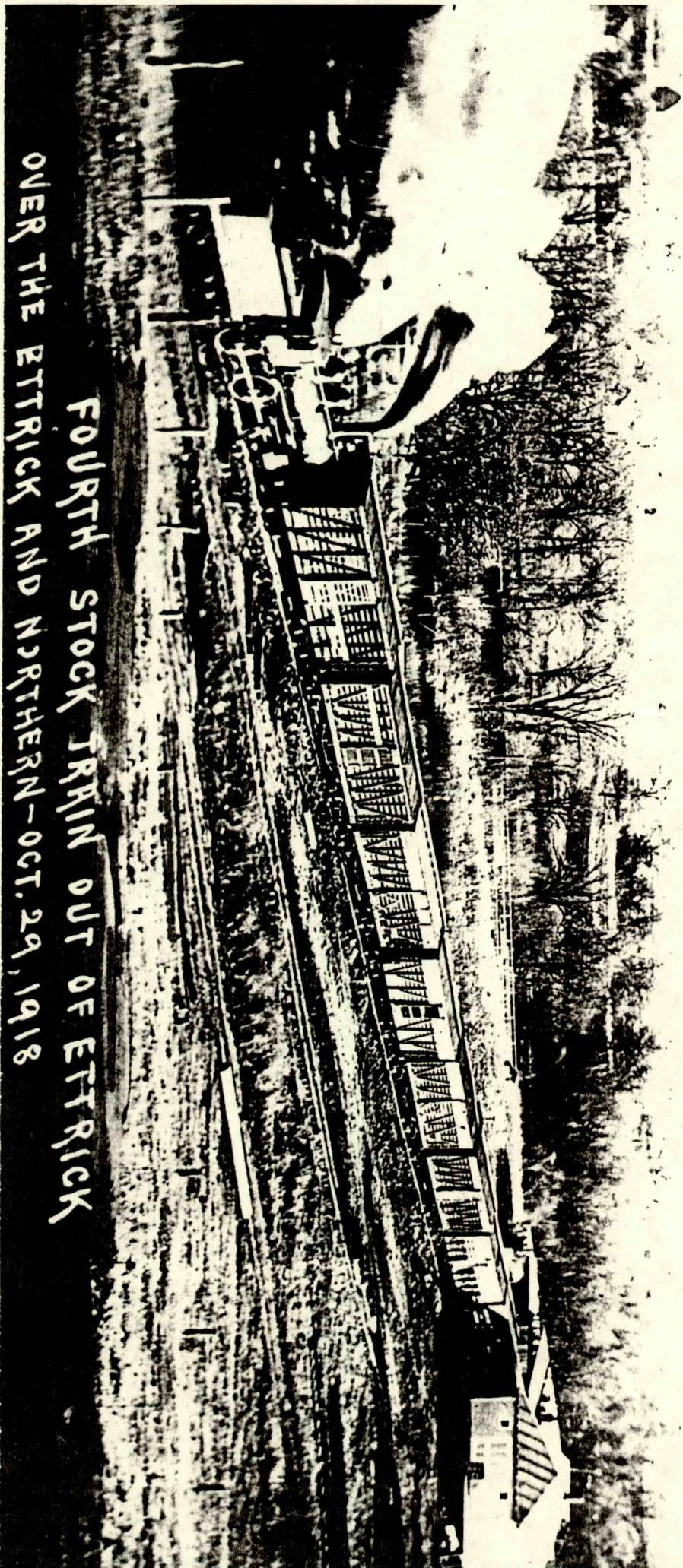
However, the Etrick and Northern established a record of sorts. It was the shortest independent railway in Wisconsin. The cut through the Blair ridge was the deepest cut in the state. It was said to have been built at a higher cost and sold at the lowest figure of any railroad to change hands.

Thus ended a dream and is the sad story of the Etrick and Northern that became more commonly known as the "Etrick and Nothing Railroad."

Description of the Etrick and Northern right of way from Blair to Etrick, June, 1915. To mention a few: 3 span pile bridge to be used as a cattle pass, clearing, grubbing, excavation 1000 cubic yards, burrow 3500 cubic yards, bridges, culverts, straighten creek, change channel, green, 35 and 70 East and West Highway, 48x53 East and West fence, 30x36 corncipe, 62x19 East and West fence, 1-36" corn pipe 40 feet long, Mattison's driveway, private road, ditch both sides, 2 span pile for water and driveway, cattle pass, private highway, highway opening 6x48 not large enough, 10 span pile, 2 span in clear (elevations).

Mrs. Victor (Helen) Folkedahl Etrick, WI

Helen's father, Maurice Casey of Etrick, who purchased the Etrick and Northern Railroad, ran a Ford dealership in Etrick for 53 years. Upon his ownership, the railroad operated three cars, one for cucumbers, another for cattle and one for mail.



FOURTH STOCK TRAIN OUT OF ETRICK
OVER THE ETRICK AND NORTHERN-OCT. 29, 1918

Photo Description: Ettrick & Northern train depot in 1918.

