

History of the Pere Marquette Railway



**Local History at the
St. Thomas Public Library**



1900: The Pere Marquette Railroad (PM) is formed by merging three small railroads in the United States: Chicago & West Michigan; Flint & Pere Marquette; and the Detroit, Grand Rapids & Western Railways. The PM is named after Père Jacques Marquette, the French Jesuit missionary who founded Michigan's first European settlement, Sault St. Marie.

1901: Car ferry *Pere Marquette 17* is placed in Lake Michigan service. The PM used car ferries on Lake Michigan to avoid the terminal and interchange delays in the area. Later, they were used on Lake Erie, the Detroit River, and in Port Huron.



Car Ferry Pere Marquette 17

1902: Car ferry (first) *Pere Marquette 18* is placed into Lake Michigan service.

January 1903: PM acquires the Lake Erie & Detroit River Railway (LE&DRR), with main lines running from Walkerville, Windsor to St. Thomas, Ontario, as well as from Sarnia to Chatham and Erieau. This begins the Pere Marquette's presence in Canada.

1904: The Pere Marquette secures running rights from Buffalo, New York and Niagara Falls, New York over the Canadian Southern railway lines to reach St. Thomas, where the PM's main Canadian facilities will be located.

1905: Shop facilities are constructed in St. Thomas.

December 1905: The first receivership begins, meaning that the company is controlled by others in order to make the best decision based on its finances, whether that is stabilizing or selling the company. The Pere Marquette has struggled financially for much of its operating life, and will continue to do so.

1906: The PM leases the London & Port Stanley (L&PS) tracks, which had been previously leased by the Lake Erie and Detroit River Railway. Sunday picnics in Port Stanley become

extremely popular. It takes an hour and twenty minutes for families in London to travel 25 miles to spend the day in Port Stanley.



A sign warning passengers that they can be fined for up to \$40 for spitting on the Railway grounds.

1907: First receivership ends.

9 September 1910: Car ferry (first) *Pere Marquette 18* sinks twenty-two miles off of Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Twenty-nine crew and passengers are drowned, as well as two sailors from another vessel who fall from an overturned lifeboat during a rescue attempt. The cause of the sinking is still a mystery.



A postcard illustrating the sinking of the 18 and the 17 coming to rescue it.

1911: Car ferry (second) *Pere Marquette 18* is placed in Lake Michigan service.

1914: PM lease of L&PS (acquired with LE&DRR) ends.

1915-1924: Many PM lines in the United States are abandoned during these years, and more continue to be abandoned until it is officially merged with the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway.

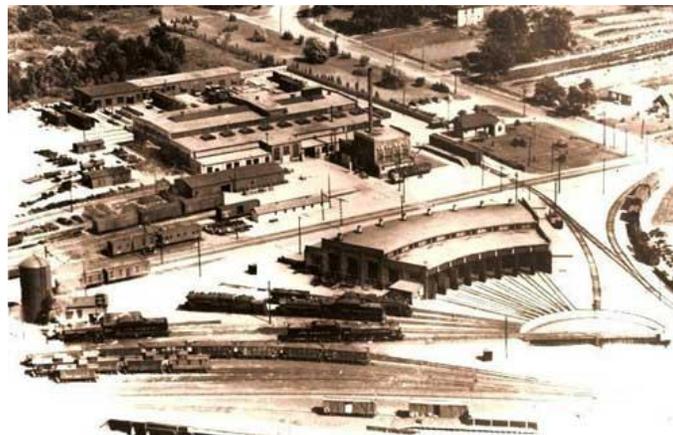
1924: The Van Sweringen Brothers, who also control the New York, Chicago & St. Louis; Erie; and Chesapeake & Ohio Railroads gain controlling interest of the Pere Marquette Railway. Their plan is to merge the four railroads to form a New York, Chicago & St. Louis railway. They apply to the Interstate Commerce Commission but are denied in 1926 for lack of funding.

1929: Chesapeake & Ohio Railway acquire controlling interest in the PM.

1941: Shop facilities are upgraded in St. Thomas. They now include a revamped track layout designed for efficient handling of locomotives, a 115 foot turntable, an eight-stall roundhouse, and a locomotive washing station.

June 1947: The Pere Marquette is completely merged with the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway.

The upgraded St. Thomas shop facilities.



1951: After WWII, railways are seriously threatened with the mass production of trucks and modern highway systems. Converting to diesel power allows longer trains and requires far less maintenance. In 1951, the C&O spends \$14 million to dieselize its Canadian division.

1972: The C&O merges with the [Baltimore & Ohio Railroad](#) and [Western Maryland Railway](#). The newly formed company is named the [Chessie System](#) after the C&O's mascot kitten, Chessie.

The C&O ad campaign: "Sleep like a kitten," featuring Chessie the kitten.



1980: The Chessie System is merged with Seaboard Coast Line Industries to form CSX Corporation. It is not legally merged out of existence until 1987, when its successor CSX Transportation is founded. The CSX still operates today.



Fun Fact: The *Pere Marquette 1225* was the prototype for the image and sounds of the engine pulling the *Polar Express* in the 2004 movie. Its name, appropriately, is the day of Christmas (12/25).



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