



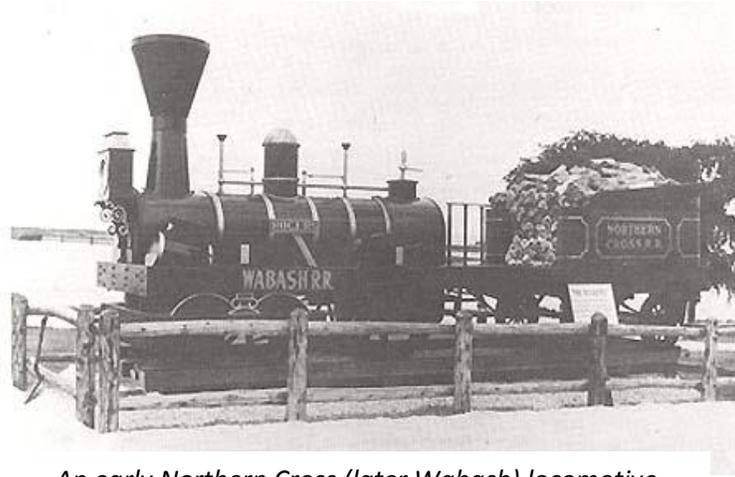
# HISTORY OF THE WABASH RAILROAD



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



**8 November 1838:** The first railroad locomotive of the future Wabash Railroad is placed on track at Meredosia, Illinois. The railroad is called the Northern Cross and is operated for nearly 10 years by the state of Illinois.



*An early Northern Cross (later Wabash) locomotive.*

**1847:** The original railroad is bought by Nicholas H. Ridgely for \$21,000.00. The locomotives of the newly-named Sangamon & Morgan Railroad have fallen into disrepair and are replaced by oxen and horse-power for almost a year before new locomotives are purchased.

**1853:** The Lake Erie, Wabash, & St. Louis Railroad Company is formed to help connect Toledo, Ohio with the state of Illinois. This is the first use of the name Wabash, which is taken from the Wabash River flowing through Illinois and Indiana.

**1865:** A new corporation is formed under the name Toledo, Wabash & Western Railway Company. It operates a direct, through line of railway starting at Toledo, Ohio, and terminating at Quincy, Illinois, and Keokuk, Iowa, a total of about 520 miles. The company thrives and expands to 678 miles of operating track. It is known as the “Wabash System.”

**10 November 1879:** Jay Gould, American railroad developer and speculator, attempts to use the Wabash roads to help create a transcontinental railroad. The Wabash Railway, the St. Louis, Kansas City, and Northern are merged into one continuous line linking Toledo with Kansas City. The Wabash, St. Louis, & Pacific Railroad Co. is incorporated and forms a central link in the Gould System.

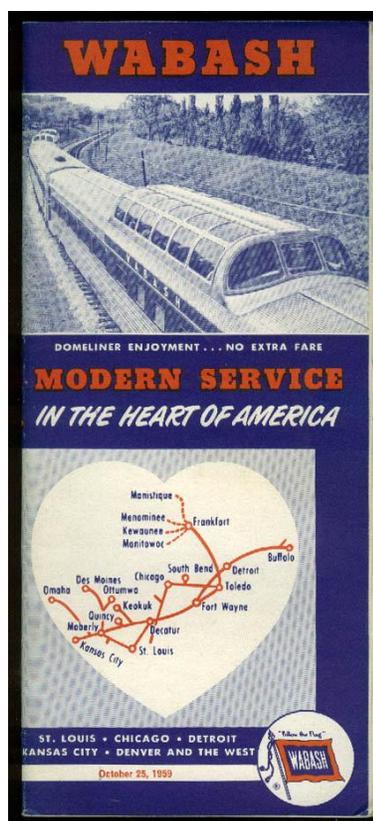
**1884:** The Wabash Banner Route flag emblem is registered at the United States Patent Office. The “*Follow the Flag*” slogan becomes famous, as it represents the well loved railroad that operates “through the heart of America.”

**1884:** Gould's Wabash is at its peak. There are 3,549 route miles operating as a result of Gould's expansions and leases.

**1885:** The railroad is over expanded and overcapitalized. The Wabash is unable to meet fixed charges and Gould's corporation crashes. Leases are cancelled and the Wabash is forced to reorganize.

**1889:** A Purchasing Commission is formed, consisting mainly of individual investors and Wabash shippers that want to see the Wabash lines operated profitably.

**1 August 1889:** The Wabash System is consolidated into the Wabash Railroad Company. John W. Bunn participates as a principal founder, consolidator, and organizer of the railroad.



**1897:** The Wabash leases the eastern lines of the former Great Western Railway between Windsor and Buffalo, which was amalgamated with the Grand Trunk in 1882. Charles M. Hays, president of the Grand Trunk and former president of the Wabash, secures a trackage rights agreement to give the Wabash operating rights in Canada. Its Canadian headquarters are located in St. Thomas because it is roughly equidistant between Detroit and Niagara Falls.

*The Wabash  
station in St.  
Thomas.*



**1903:** George Jay Gould, Jay Gould's eldest son, attempts to revive his father's dream of a transcontinental railway. He begins building the Wabash-Pittsburgh Terminal, which is opened on April 13, 1904. As before, the Wabash forms the midwestern link between Pittsburgh and Kansas City. Construction costs are huge and the project will eventually force the company into receivership for the second time.

**1905:** The Wabash is the first railroad to recognize and designate the city of St. Louis as a billing station for freight to and from points east of the Mississippi River, eliminating bridge tolls on freight formerly billed to East St. Louis. This practice had slowed industrial and business development in St. Louis. The *St. Louis Republic* declares: "The Wabash Railroad has put St. Louis on the map."

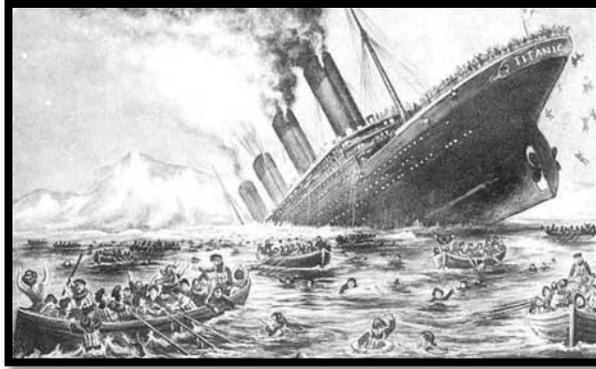
**24 August 1906:** The Wabash is blamed for the crash involving a C.P.R. train that left two men dead. Murray Stephens, engineer of the Wabash train, is arrested for manslaughter almost a year later, as he left the country after the accident and did not return until spring 1907.

26 December 1911: The Wabash enters receivership.

**24 August 1906:** The Wabash is blamed for a crash just outside the St. Thomas city limits involving a C.P.R. train that left two men dead. Murray Stephens, engineer of the Wabash train, is arrested for manslaughter almost a year later, as he left the country after the accident and did not return until the spring of 1907.

**26 December 1911:** The Wabash enters receivership.

**April 1912:** Charles Hayes' railroad career ends with his tragic death in the sinking of the *Titanic*. However, the agreement made between the Wabash and the Grand Trunk in 1897 remains in effect, even with future successor lines.



A postcard depicting the sinking of the Titanic.

**21 July 1915:** The Wabash Railroad Company is sold at foreclosure. With only a minor change of name, the Wabash Railway Company is incorporated on October 22, 1915. The company is improving and has expanded again during the time of the First World War.

**1920s:** The Wabash and the Delaware & Hudson make a financial alliance in order to jointly purchase the Leigh Valley. In 1928, the Pennsylvania Railroad takes active interest in the alliance and buys in to protect itself. The D&H withdraws from further participation and the Pennsylvania takes over full financial control of the Wabash. However, the new management shows few outward signs of influence.

### Wabash Cannonball

Primo

American Traditional

*Introduction*

Chorus: Lis-ten to the jin-gle, the rum-ble and the roar as she  
 From the great At-lan-tic o-cean, to the wide Pa-ci-fic shore To the  
 The east-ern states are dan-dies so the west-ern peo-ple say From

glides a - long the wood-lands, through hills and by the shore Hear the  
 queen of the flow-ing moun-tains To the south-bell by the door She's  
 New York to St. Lou-is, and Chi-ca-go by the way Through the

*A folksong called the "Wabash Cannonball" becomes extremely famous in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is about a fictional Wabash passenger train, because the only Wabash Cannonball is an engine named after the song.*

**1925:** The Wabash acquires control of the Ann Arbor Railroad, though the Ann Arbor keeps its corporate identity.

**1933:** The Wabash is the first large railroad forced into receivership as a result of the Great Depression.

**December 1941:** The longest receivership in Wabash history comes to a close with the approval of a reorganization plan. All properties and assets are sold for \$31,000,000.00 and on January 1, 1942, the Wabash Railroad Company takes over operations.

**1946:** The first diesel road units are placed in Wabash passenger service.

**February 1950:** The streamliner is introduced between Chicago and St. Louis, featuring the Wabash *Blue Bird*, a favourite passenger train on the railway.

**April 1953:** Wabash's Canadian Division is fully dieselized, and by the end of 1953, so is the majority of its American Division.

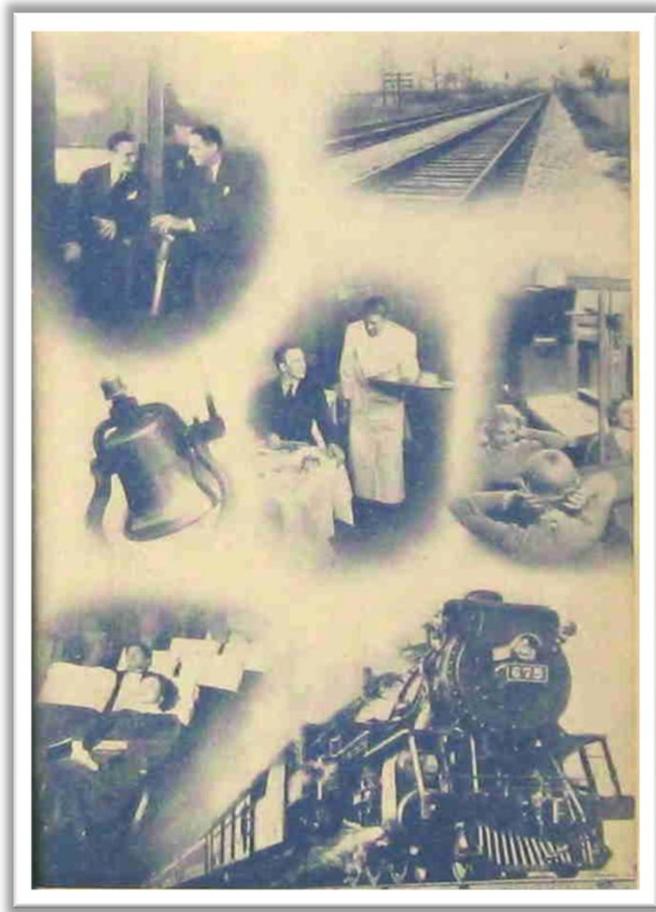
**1960:** The Norfolk & Western and the Nickel Plate Road (NKP) agree to merge, with the successor company to be the Norfolk & Western. The Pennsylvania is looking for a merger with the New York Central and encourages inclusion of the Wabash in the N&W-NKP merger. The proposal is put before the Interstate Commerce Commission on March 17, 1960.

**16 October 1964:** The Wabash is leased to the Norfolk & Western Railway and ends operations under the Wabash name. Much of the track continues to operate today under the Norfolk Southern Railway.

*The Wabash had a special reputation for providing the best experience when traveling by rail. Many people who knew the railway while it was still in operation attest to the fact that it was always smooth and efficient. The road was in good shape and the service was excellent. It is remembered fondly by all those who were familiar with it.*



*Lounge  
car in the  
Blue Bird.*



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