

GP&A RR

*Railroad Lore and Legend
Historic Fact and Fancy*

April 10th 1910

Branch Junction, Michigan

The Name Game

The Grand Pacific and Atlantic Railroad (GP&A RR), headquartered in Kalamazoo, Michigan, is the parent company of the Union Pacific and the New York Central. Philip Kunze is the proprietor and operator of the railroad. The Grand Pacific and Atlantic Railroad extends the golden spike railroad to the east coast.

Like many alphabet-soup railroads, the GP&A will acquire nicknames. (For example, Kalamazoo's homegrown railroad, the Chicago, Kalamazoo and Saginaw, or CK&S, begun in 1871, was affectionately known as the "Cuss, Kick, and Swear". The Maryland and Pennsylvania was known as the "Ma and Pa". The Indiana, Bloomington and Western was known as "I Better Walk". And the New York, Ontario & Western was known as the "Old and Weary". Well, maybe I shouldn't have mentioned that one.) The GP&A could be called the "Grand Pointless Anachronism" (an homage to the Amtrak logo dubbed the Pointless Arrow, and a reference to the juxtaposition of times and places on the GP&A). Or it could be called the "Grand Perfect Absurdity" (what could be more absurd than merging a surviving railroad with a "fallen flag"?).

However, I simply prefer to think of it as the "GRANDPA" (read GrandPA) Railroad. This, my fourth, and final, round of three-rail O-Gauge railroading began a few months after our first grandchild, Daniel, was born. We gave Daniel the Pennsylvania Railroad for his first Christmas (we had given Daniel's mother Sondra, our daughter, Amtrak when she was a child). From then on, the choices were clear:

The *New York Central* would be fun to operate as a "friendly" competitor of Daniel's railroad, and our son, Erik, lived in New York at the time (we had given him an east coast railroad, the Bangor and Aroostook, when he was a child);

The *Union Pacific* was my first O27-Gauge railroad when I was a child, and was one of my father's favorites.

Voila, as the proprietor of the Union Pacific and New York Central (and allowing myself some liberties of time and place), I became a *coast-to-coast railroad baron*. My railroad spans four family generations, as well as the coasts. The choice of a name for my railroad empire was clear: Grand Pacific and Atlantic Railroad, which I could nickname the "GRANDPA" Railroad.

A Brief History of GP&A Predecessor Railroads
(okay, revisionist history)

(Suspension of disbelief, please....)

The Grand Pacific and Atlantic Railroad (GP&A) runs through a small town we'll call Branch Junction, Michigan. The GP&A operates the Union Pacific (UP) and New York Central (NYC). Branch Junction is located just west of Kalamazoo, near the original site of the eastern terminus of the Celery Flats and Southwestern Railroad (CF&SW) that was chartered and built for shipping produce to market shortly after the Central Railroad reached Kalamazoo from Detroit in 1846. The CF&SW, however, did not manage to connect with the Central as planned. Like many railroads of that era (and probably for many of the same reasons), the Celery Flats and Southwestern fell into receivership within a few years. Thus begins the story of the GP&A predecessor railroads and a junction that led to the founding of a town.

A group of local investors purchased the CF&SW. They extended it east to an interchange with the Central (which by then was privatized, ran to Chicago, and had become the Michigan Central); they extended it west to the resort town of Picturesque Glen on Lake Michigan; they initiated passenger service; they increased freight traffic; and they renamed the railroad Junction and Picturesque Glen (J&PG) to describe its revitalized market. The J&PG (nicknamed the "Jpeg") advertised itself as the "picturesque railroad". (Interestingly, about a hundred years later Jpegs would again be associated with pictures.)

The railroad thrived with its resort traffic to Picturesque Glen, and its numerous sidings that served the burgeoning agricultural and manufacturing industries along its tracks.

The east shore of Lake Michigan became a popular tourist destination for Chicago folk. During the 1870s and 1880s the J&PG commissioned engravings by the noted Chicago wood engraver, R. E. E. Kunze, to promote the tranquil and bucolic qualities of Picturesque Glen as a haven from city life. (After all, my great-grandfather's wood engravings of similar settings *were* published in *Picturesque Canada* at about that time.)

Beginning in the 1800s, railroads put cities on the map or made their dots on the map more important. At that time a farmer could travel up to about eight miles to market in a day to sell produce. The J&PG extended that range and opened up a fertile fruit growing region in southwest Michigan. The J&PG enabled lumbering operations in several counties to expand (for better or for worse). Industry flourished along the tracks as the manufacturing of wood, paper, and other products leveraged the abundant natural resources in the area. Thus, the J&PG helped many small communities in the Kalamazoo area prosper, and led to the founding of other communities as it laid tracks toward Lake Michigan.

By the close of the 19th century the Michigan Central (MC) acquired the Junction and Picturesque Glen Railroad and it became the Picturesque Glen Branch Line of the Michigan Central. Over time, a small town developed at the junction on the outskirts of Kalamazoo and incorporated as Branch Junction.

This brief history is a prequel for railroad operations and trainwatching in Branch Junction during the 20th century. At any given time, beginning about 100 years after the iron horse first rode the rails in this country, an interesting mix of *road names* and *trains* might have told varied *stories* along the tracks in Branch Junction on what is now the GP&A.

Alphabet Soup

(or, sorting out the road names you might see in Branch Junction)

In the late 1800s, the Michigan Central was an important link to Chicago for what was then Vanderbilt's New York Central and Hudson River Railroad. The eastern railroad growth consolidations of that era were mostly completed by the turn of the century as large railroads emerged and competed for routes connecting to the western frontier.

At about the time that our railroad operations and trainwatching in Branch Junction begin early in the 20th century, the New York Central leased the Michigan Central (including its Picturesque Glen Branch Line). The NYC right-of-way through Kalamazoo and Branch Junction was the only east-west mainline railroad in southern Michigan, connecting Detroit and Chicago. The Pennsylvania (PRR) and Grand Trunk (GT) ran north-south with crossings and interchanges with NYC. But, with its heavy east-west traffic, the NYC clearly dominated Branch Junction tracks.

US trackage peaked at about 254,000 miles in 1916. Trains offered comfortable and convenient travel between many cities, and moved great quantities of freight. Then, automobile, bus, and truck competition increased during the first half of the century. Railroad passenger travel and freight declined. Short lines were abandoned, as natural resources (for which they were built) were depleted. Wars, depression, and government regulation added to railroad woes. Consolidations were inevitable again in the 20th century. This time though, the result of decline, not growth.

Through two World Wars and the Great Depression, NYC and PRR competed vigorously with one another for passengers and freight in the east and midwest. NYC controlled, leased, acquired, or merged a number of railroads during the late 1800s and early 1900s, including MC, P&LE, T&OC, BA, CCC&StL. PRR made similar moves. But with vast infrastructures in declining markets, neither NYC nor PRR could survive alone. The inevitable finally happened on February 1st 1968 when NYC merged with its archrival PRR, creating Penn Central (PC), and the dominant railroad in the northeast. The New Haven merged into PC in 1969. With depressed steel and auto industries, PC collapsed into bankruptcy in June 1970. The still freshly-painted PC engines and cars continued to roll through Branch Junction for years, intermingled with successor Amtrak and Conrail liveries during the 1970s. Other railroads fell into bankruptcy and consolidated as the US sorted out its transportation priorities.

Commercial aviation and the Interstate Highway System (and again, unfavorable regulatory practices) had contributed to the steady decline of railroad passenger travel after WWII. The decline of passenger service accelerated in 1967 when the Post Office canceled most Railway Mail Service contracts (an important source of passenger train revenue). Congress stepped in to save intercity passenger service after the collapse of PC by creating Amtrak (AMTK) in May 1971. This quasi-governmental agency took over passenger service for 27 Class 1 railroads, including PC, UP, MP, SP, IC, and ATSF, operating a passenger system approximately half its former size. Amtrak has rolled through Branch Junction ever since.

Railroad freight traffic also declined. The northeast was especially hard-hit, with six major railroads having declared bankruptcy. Conrail (CR) was formed in 1976 as a federally-funded takeover of those railroads (the so-called anthracite railroads, PC, RDG, EL, LV, CNJ, L&HR). So in the last quarter of the 20th century, Conrail, a new railroad, hauling predecessor railroad freight, was rolling through Branch Junction. Conrail became profitable (by the loosening of ICC controls and divesting northeast corridor passenger service) and was privatized in 1986.

With CR success, came a takeover battle for it between Norfolk Southern (NS) and CSX, both aggregations of time-honored and familiar railroad names. NS acquired the larger share of CR, including CR and NYC reporting marks and began operations in 1999. By the turn of the 21st century NS liveries were rolling through Branch Junction.

Thus, during the 20th century we saw tracks in Branch Junction controlled by MC, NYC, PC, AMTK, CR, and NS. But wait, there's more...

Meanwhile out west, consolidations were also under way. The Santa Fe and Burlington Northern merged to become BNSF. UP merged WP, MP, MKT, CNW, and SP (which included D&RGW). The UP livery was then the oldest surviving major railroad mark.

This set the stage for (suspension of disbelief again, please...) the next major merger: the UP and NYC. The Union Pacific acquired old New York Central trackage through Michigan from Chicago to New York, extending its domain to the East Coast, just as the acquisitions of the Missouri Pacific and Southern Pacific extended its domain to the Gulf Coast. The Grand Pacific and Atlantic Railroad was organized as the parent company of the UP and the former NYC. Thus, Branch Junction is now located on a transcontinental tri-coastal railroad. And, as they say, the rest is (or will be) history.

You won't see the GP&A on any trains in Branch Junction because it is a railroad holding company. But its railroads, the NYC and later the UP have played important roles in the development of the town during the glamorous and not-so-glamorous years of the last century. "Central" has been a key ingredient in Branch Junction (alphabet soup) since the arrival of the Central Railroad in Kalamazoo in 1846. The Michigan Central, New York Central, and finally Penn Central brought a succession of "Central" road names through this part of Michigan.

Colorful local and regional traffic on the GP&A includes: Pere Marquette (PM, later C&O, Chessie System, CSX) interchanging in Picturesque Glen; Henry Ford's Detroit Toledo and Ironton (DTI); Ann Arbor Railroad (AAR); Elgin, Joliet, and Eastern (EJ&E, beltway around Chicago); many NYC, PRR, and UP predecessor railroads; various Midwestern terminal marks; and an assortment of company-owned cars serving local and regional industries.

Trainwatchers in Branch Junction, then, will see, depending upon the decade of their visit, a variety of combinations of NYC / PC / AMTK / CR / UP liveries and operations. Passenger and freight traffic includes their predecessor, merged, affiliated, and interchanged liveries, and those of many other railroads, near and far, past and present.

From Steam to Diesel

(or, why this variety of engines and cars rumbles through town)

Branch Junction is set in about the last 40 years of the steam era and the first 40 years of the diesel era during the 1900s, overlapping in mid-century (frequently called the transitional era).

During the *steam era* in Branch Junction a NYC B6 switcher, Hudson, Mikado, and even an S2 electric (one of the few places outside of New York electrified on the NYC), may be spotted handling passenger cars, troop trains, freight traffic, and mixed dailies. Passenger cars of the era were NYC heavyweights and early Pullman streamlined cars (Pullman Bradleys). Freight cars, like passenger cars, were transitioning from wood to steel during the steam era.

The year 1957 is generally regarded as the end of steam. During the *transitional era* in Branch Junction NYC F3 and E8 diesels were added to the mix, pulling NYC streamlined and older passenger cars and freight cars.

During the early years of the *diesel era* in Branch Junction, as increasingly colorful engines replaced gray and black ones, a PC SW1 might be seen working with a CR or UP Dash 8 or a CNW GP38. UP and CNW streamlined cars might be mixed with Amtrak Heritage cars during the early years of the national rail passenger service. Freight cars were becoming larger and increasingly complex and specialized by this time.

Storytelling

(or, railroad operations, as they're called)

The stories of railroads and railroading are writ large in American history.

Through the livery transitions and locomotive eras of the 20th century, Branch Junction has been a nexus for a branch line and a town on an east-west mainline. Over the years Branch Junction has sustained a few local industries, a passenger station, junction, and interchange yards. The stage is set for some interesting railroading and storytelling.

Branch Junction is the setting for several possible “reenactments” of railroad operations at different times during the 20th century:

A single-track east-west mainline with a junction and yard in Branch Junction, and a single-track branch line with interchanges and a terminus in Picturesque Glen, same railroad. The early to mid-century NYC / PC reenactments could include interchange traffic and switching operations for local industries, mainline and branch passenger and freight service, and mixed dailies to Picturesque Glen.

A double-track east-west mainline, one railroad, with division point yards in Branch Junction. Any time during the century, NYC / PC / CR / UP reenactments could include switching operations and way freight for local industries, mainline freight classification and through-train service, and mainline passenger stops and occasional excursion trains.

A single-track east-west mainline, and a single-track north-south mainline, with a junction and interchange yards in Branch Junction, same or different railroads. Any time during the century, NYC / PC / CR / UP reenactments could include interchange traffic and switching operations and way freight for local industries, and mainline passenger stops and occasional excursion trains.

A single-track east-west through mainline, and a single-track north-south mainline terminating in Branch Junction, with a junction and interchange yards, same or different railroads. Any time during the century, NYC / PC / CR / UP reenactments could include interchange traffic and switching operations and way freight for local industries, mainline passenger stops and occasional excursion trains, and terminal train servicing.

A century in Branch Junction, like a century in any small town on a railroad, sees changes of railroad names, equipment, and operations, but for the most part, the layout of a town and tracks doesn't change all that much (okay, maybe a little less in Branch Junction than in the real world).

So the stories about a branch line, single-track mainline, or double-track mainline in Branch Junction over the years can be told in the same setting, and are pretty much like the stories of any small American railroad town.

Some of the more interesting stories are worth telling and retelling.

One of the more important and earliest stories to be told about Branch Junction (indeed, its *raison d'être*) is related to Michigan's fruit belt, dating back to the 1870s. The Michigan fruit belt, one of the state's most productive agricultural areas (a combination of climate, soil, and terrain), stretches east from Lake Michigan through Van Buren County to Kalamazoo County. Until the 1870s commercial fruit production, dependent on lake transportation to reach Chicago markets, was limited to the Lake Michigan shoreline. The arrival of the J&PG in Picturesque Glen and the founding of the Blueberry Exchange there marked the beginning of the development of the fruit culture in southwestern Michigan and expansion to markets beyond Chicago via rail. Reefers from faraway places will be seen on the branch line early in the century.

Another important story is about tourism in Picturesque Glen, the terminus of the branch line. From its humble beginnings as the Paynes Gray artist colony on the shore of Lake Michigan, this small community has been a haven from city life since the late 1800s. Several daily passenger trains brought tourists from as far away as Chicago. They were met by carriages, and later by horseless carriages, to take them to lodges and resorts that dotted small lakeshore communities.

While Picturesque Glen was the terminus of the branch line, it was also an important link to markets beyond southwest Michigan. Its Lake Michigan port and interchange with the Pere Marquette (later the C&O, then Chessie System, and finally CSX) were gateways for Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and northern Michigan commerce.

Local industries sprang up along the tracks as rails were laid. This began with deforestation and the lumbering industries in the 1800s and continued into the next century with the development of the furniture industry and numerous manufacturing specialties, including paper, chemicals, and later plastics and auto parts.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century the Picturesque Glen Branch Line (of the Michigan Central and later the New York Central) served fruit farmers and other farmers along the way with daily freights and milk trains. In the second half of the century, as automobiles and trucks increasingly met the needs of those customers, branch line traffic declined and mixed dailies met the remaining needs, mostly rail fans and assorted freight.

Major Midwest rail centers in Chicago and St. Louis occasion sightings of related terminal traffic in Branch Junction any time during the 20th century.

Freight cars from predecessor and affiliated railroads of the NYC, including Michigan Central, Pittsburgh and Lake Erie, and Toledo and Ohio Central, are frequently seen in Branch Junction.

Ford hoppers recall the era of Henry Ford ownership of the DT&I followed by PRR, PC, and GT, all part of Branch Junction's history.

The freight cars seen in Branch Junction trace the evolution of their forms: from iced wooden reefers to mechanical reefers; from 34' wooden box cars to large steel box cars; from flat cars transporting automobiles to box cars to intermodal car carriers; from wooden tank and vat cars to

specialty tank cars; from open hopper cars to large closed cylindrical hoppers designed for specific kinds of products.

Branch Junction answered the call during two World Wars. Troop trains, American Red Cross cars, military production, wartime gondolas, and USRA standard equipment all evidence participation in global conflicts.

The passenger cars we see in Branch Junction over the years tell interesting stories. The earliest are NYC heavyweights, so called because, you guessed it, they were heavy. Heavyweights began getting makeovers in the 1930s with an interest in streamlining. NYC tried streamlining its steam engines too, with mixed results. From the beginnings of the diesel era, streamlining was an important component of railroad strategies for rebuilding passenger traffic after the Great Depression and World War II. Gleaming streamlined fleets and named trains, like the 20th Century Limited, connected major cities. Branch Junction saw the evolution of these New York Central, Penn Central, and Amtrak passenger cars.

In the early days of Amtrak its trains included locomotives and cars from many different railroads, sometimes in their original liveries, mixed with Amtrak paint schemes, and sometimes pulled by contract locomotives from various other railroads.

And up-to-the-minute reminders of Branch Junction's railroad history include Rock Island, Missouri Pacific, Chicago and Northwestern, Southern Pacific, and numerous other progenitors of today's Union Pacific.

Various combinations of these stories may be reenacted on any given day in Branch Junction. Indeed, they tell a panoramic history of Branch Junction.

And more broadly, Branch Junction tells the story of Michigan and America. It tells stories about how railroads helped to build cities, about romance, danger, hardship, and hard work. About how the railroad, as our first national industry and highway, helped to build communities into a nation. There are, however, many railroad stories that are not told in Branch Junction: about those who built and operated railroads, and those who bought and sold them; about risking all financially; about building fortunes and losing them; about how both NYC and UP had their shares of scoundrels; about bitter rivalries and polemics; about the national love/hate relationships with railroads, as with giant corporations of today; about the depletion of local and national resources; about railroad deterioration and abandonment, and its local and national aftermath. While there is much yet to be learned today from those and other very real railroad stories, Branch Junction is more about trackside towns and villages of yesteryear.

So perhaps, some of the most interesting stories to be told about Branch Junction are in the *Train Times Museum*, operated by the Branch Junction Historical Society. The collection began with an old Michigan Central tank car and grew to include New York Central, Pennsylvania, and Penn Central artifacts, eventually representing the rail history of Branch Junction. With the establishment of the Grand Pacific and Atlantic in Kalamazoo, the Union Pacific (suspension of disbelief again, please...) relocated some of its streamlined *City of Los Angeles* passenger cars from storage to the *Train Times Museum* for excursion use in the Midwest. (Union Pacific museums remain in Council Bluffs and Cheyenne.) Excursions are now an exciting enterprise in Branch Junction, adding interesting visuals and train operations to the railroad landscape over the years, and attracting railfans from all over. *Train Times Museum* features an O-scale model train layout of Branch Junction, always popular with children of all ages.

Time and Place
(all things are connected)

Railroad modelers tend to build layouts ranging from freelanded (invented or mixed and matched railroads and/or time periods) to prototypical (accurate railroad, location, and time period). Instead of being a mythical or prototypical railroad, the Grand Pacific and Atlantic Railroad is temporal typical of the 20th century and toptotypical of the Midwest. Anyone familiar with my *Time and Place Synchronics* product development work may recognize some conceptual parallels. My model railroading is another exploration of time and place and storytelling.

And speaking of time, it is also interesting to note that the railroads in America gave us our standardized time zones in 1883 (and it took Congress another 35 years to adopt them).

As aforementioned, the magic of being a railroad baron includes liberties of time and place. Another part of the magic is that every locomotive, car, and building in Branch Junction is in like-new condition, regardless of its age (this topotown is, in effect, timeless). And finally, the operation of the Grand Pacific and Atlantic Railroad is magical. It is my railroad and I run it as I please. I know from my career working in Corporate America the meaning of that old expression “. . . no way to run a railroad.” Now I decide how to run this railroad. Railroad barons can work that kind of magic.

The GRANDPA Railroad has enjoyed strong economic, business, and civic (read family) support over the years. While many railroads in the region suffered through decline and abandonment in the second half of the last century, the heritage, infrastructure, and right-of-way of the GRANDPA Railroad have endured. The artifacts in Branch Junction today are a tribute to the extraordinary contributions of railroads in our country, as well as reminders of advancing technologies and associated economic and social change. Only time will tell, as they say, if the GRANDPA Railroad legacy will be sustained for generations to come.

This story begins, appropriately, when my father was born, April 10th 1910. He grew up with early Lionel toy trains during the heyday of railroading in this country. He modeled in HO during the early years of scale model railroading. He gave me Lionel trains and built a layout for me in our basement in Chicago. He was a railfan all of his life.

Grandpa Phil