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**Freight Car Movements on the Suncook Valley Railroad**
**On its final 50 days of Existence**
**(November 1, 1952 to December 20, 1952)**

The Suncook Valley Railroad was a 25 mile rural short line that linked Pittsfield, NH and other small villages in the Suncook River Valley with the Boston & Maine RR at Concord, NH. At the time of these records the sole motive power on the railroad was Number 3, a nearly new GE 44 ton diesel locomotive. The SuV mixed trains made two round trips daily except Sunday over the entire length of the line. Each train carried a former B&M wood bodied baggage-mail combination car. The combine had a 15 foot RPO section serviced by a railway mail clerk. The combine also carried Railway Express Agency shipments. The train crew rode the combine, which contained a few chairs for the accommodation of an occasional passenger. The total crew of three included the conductor, trainman and Oscar Brien, the engineer. Edmond J. Stapleton was the General Manager of the SuV and maintained his office in the Pittsfield passenger station.

The information found on enclosures was gathered from interchange records made by yard clerks in the Boston & Maine yard at Concord, NH. The records were hand written on B&M "Form CT-96, Revised" entitled "Train Car List". Generally the first daily round trip originating at Pittsfield carried only the combine to Concord, and returned with freight cars and the combine. The second round trip usually carried freight cars to the B&M interchange and returned to Pittsfield with only the combine.

The final scheduled train on the Suncook Valley was the afternoon run from Concord on Monday, December 15, 1952. The RPO never quite reached Pittsfield that day, as somewhere between Epsom and Pittsfield a heavily laden hopper car of coal spread the rails and it and the combine ended up on the ground. The mail clerk and the mail bags finished their final journey via rescue motor vehicle. On Saturday, December 20, 1952 the SuV made a final clean up run and delivered four loads and five empties to Concord yard.

## Observations Made from an Analysis of the Interchange Records.

The model railroader interested in prototypical freight car operations and rolling stock during the steam to diesel transition era might find these records of actual car movements on the Suncook Valley a reference source of great value. The SuV was typical of many struggling short lines as well as marginal rural branch lines of Class One carriers.

### TRAFFIC DENSITY

During the 45 days from November 1 to December 15, 1952 the mixed trains of the Suncook Valley ran a total of 37 days. (After subtracting 7 Sundays and Thanksgiving day.) Two round trips each day (25 miles x 4) equals 100 train miles per day for total train miles during this period of 3,700 miles plus the 25 miles run on December 20th.

These 74 round trips carried a total of 82 revenue carloads that terminated on the Suncook Valley and carried 27 revenue carloads that originated on the SuV. The combined total of 109 revenue carloads

averages out to 1.47 revenue carloads per round trip….not exactly the kind of record that would overtax the road's 44 tonner.

## FREIGHT CAR OWNERSHIP

From a modeler's standpoint I was surprised to note that in addition to the common "flags" such as PRR, ATSF, NYC, UP etc. showing up in the car records, there was quite a showing of relatively rare cars. For example, for New England short lines one might not normally model cars of such roads as the Ontario Northland, Cambria & Indiana, Green Bay & Western, Birmingham Southern, Detroit & Mackinac and Lehigh & New England. And yet cars of these ownerships showed up on the SuV! Modelers may also be interested in noting that a Burlington box car appeared with FWD initials (Burlington subsidiary Fort Worth & Denver) and an SP box car appeared with TNO initials (SP subsidiary Texas & New Orleans). Once again I make the point that when choosing box cars for your model railroad that anything goes. Box cars were freely interchanged and were at home nearly anywhere at any time.

I also noted that the hopper cars of anthracite coal destined to points on the Suncook Valley moved in hoppers of the "Anthracite Roads", and cars of bituminous coal (or soft coal) moved in cars of the originating roads. In this case Cambria & Indiana, PRR and B&O. It should be noted that only the PRR and Erie served both Anthracite and Bituminous coal fields.

## LOCAL MOVES

There were several local movements of cars between the SuV and points on the Boston & Maine, the SuV's only connection. I would have expected that such local moves would move in cars of B&M ownership. Such was not the case. Four cars of pulpwood loaded at SuV points for Berlin, NH were loaded into "foreign" (meaning other than B&M) box cars. By way of explanation: The SuV terminated many more box cars than it originated. Mr. Stapleton operated independently of the B&M and he obviously thumbed his nose at the larger road's car service rules. It was less expensive for the SuV to load pulpwood into a box car made empty on its line than it would to have Concord yard send up an empty B&M box car.

I found only three cars of B&M ownership on the SuV interchange reports. One was B&M 92292, a gondola loaded on the SuV and forwarded to Concord on November 10 for weighing and furtherance to the CP at Wells River. No further details could be gleaned from the interchange report, but I assume it was loaded with scrap iron. The two other B&M cars were single sheathed, outside braced box cars. BM 71399 came in from Concord on November 19 with a load of bagged feed for Merrimack Farmers Exchange in Pittsfield and went out November 22 with a few LCL shipments for transfer at the B&M freight house in Concord. On November 19 BM 72286 departed Pittsfield with a load of wooden box material for Jackson, MI via B&M – Rott Jct – NYC. My interchange sheets do not show a record of BM 72286 or BM 92292 being delivered to the SuV. Perhaps the yard clerks made no record of B&M empties being delivered to the SuV.

## CANADIAN CARS

For every rule of thumb, exceptions can generally be found. It has long been my understanding that due to customs regulations cars of Canadian ownership could not be used for movements of freight entirely within the United States. It was okay to load a Canadian car to a destination in Canada or for movement via Canada. If no such loads were available, empty Canadian cars were supposed to be promptly returned to Canada. In spite of these rules the Suncook Valley seemed to have an unusual amount of Canadian box cars on its lines. Of the 73 carloads in box cars terminating on the Suncook Valley during Nov-Dec, 1952, 26 box cars were of Canadian ownership or 36% of the total.

11 of the Canadian box cars actually were loaded at Canadian origins and contained either lumber or grain. I presume the lumber loads went to Emerson Mfg. Co. in Suncook, for furniture making. The loads of grain were destined to the Fowler mill in Suncook which brought in grain for mixing and bagging as animal feed. The other 15 Canadian box cars originated at three different feed mills in New Hampshire and Vermont. One of the originating mills was H. K. Webster on the CP at Richford, VT, producers of Blue Seal feeds. Another was St. Albans Grain Co. on the CV at St. Albans, VT, producers of Wirthmore Feeds. The third mill was Merrimack Farmers Exchange on the B&M at Concord, NH, producers of Merrimack Feeds. Each of these mills enjoyed the benefits of "milling in transit" rates which meant that inbound carloads of grain could be milled and mixed and later re-shipped in bags in box cars to customers out in the field, ie. retail feed stores at such places as Epsom and Pittsfield. The benefit of this was that the carload shipments were charged the balance of the through rate from origin to destination, which was far less than the local rate from the mill to the feed store. Detailed records were kept by the railroad's accounting offices so as to equalize inbound tonnages of bulk grain with the outbound tonnages of feed in bags. The feed mills often brought grain in via CN-CV or CP routings thus permitting the outbound feed cars to continue in a southerly direction at the through rates via CN-CV-B&M-Suv or CP-B&M-SuV. I hope this explains why the feed mills could justify loading bagged feed at stations in New Hampshire and Vermont into Canadian box cars. I would further assume that the CP or CN cars loaded at the New England mills were made empty at the mill with earlier arrivals of grain.

Most of the Canadian box cars on the SuV returned empty to Concord yard except for four exceptions. Two cars were loaded with piddling amounts of LCL and forwarded to the B&M freight house in Concord for transfer. And the SuV loaded two Canadian box cars with wood chips that were shipped to Stockport, NY via SuV-B&M-Troy-NYC. Stockport is on the New York Central south of Troy on the mainline to New York City. (Not exactly "to or in the direction of Canada"). I assume at this stage of the game Mgr. Stapleton of the Suncook Valley couldn't care less about AAR and Customs rules on loading Canadian cars.

## LESS THAN CARLOAD FREIGHT (LCL)

LCL shipments did not move very frequently on the SuV. The interchange records show a total of 3 box cars used to move LCL mdse. from the Concord freight house to the SuV. In the reverse direction the SuV used eight box cars to move LCL shipments, 6 cars to Concord and one car each to Bangor, ME and Syracuse, NY. Only two of the interchange records showed the weight of the LCL shipments in the car. One carried 350 lbs., the other carried 413 lbs. Looking back to 1938 the B&M's "Fast Freight" sales booklet indicated that Boston made up a *daily* car of LCL shipments to the Suncook Valley RR and a second *daily* car of LCL to Suncook, NH, then a station on the B&M. The same publication advertised a *daily* car of LCL merchandise from the SuV to Concord, NH. The promises of 1938 did not carry through to 1952!

I would welcome your questions, comments and corrections.

*Dwight Smith*