

NY-Lake Erie Railroad Adds Second Dining Car

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By LINDA TOOMEY

GOWANDA — A second dining car, the newest addition to the New York Lake Erie Railroad, is named for Daniel Webster, an early traveler of the rail line dating back to a trip from Piermont-on-the-Hudson to Dunkirk in 1851.

Travel by rail has certainly changed since Webster's first trip along the same tracks on May 14, 1851. Webster sat in a rocking chair fastened to an open car for most of the two-day trip.

The Daniel Webster dining car officially joined the NY & LE's other diner, The City Of Salamanca, at a special event for the line over the weekend. The additional car adds seating for 98 people during the week-end dining excursions on Saturday evening and Sunday afternoons.

Robert Dingman, owner and operator of the New York & Lake Erie Railroad, said the new car is due to the dedicated work of Charles Hensel and his crew.

"Charlie Hensel saw the potential of the car and was the engineering force behind its refurbishing. He was our engineer, and consultant and chief contractor," Dingman said.

Dingman said the refurbishing of the car represents about a \$15,000 investment, while noting the two dining cars have air conditioning for the summer and heating when colder weather sets in. The newest car is a Baltimore & Ohio coach build around 1930.

The dining train travels at about 10 mph, and diners have no fear of having to balance their diner fare. The new

dining cars have heavier weighted springs which reduce the vibration of the rails.

When NY&LE acquired the car it had been in a fire, was rusted through in most of the flooring and had a buckled exterior, according to Hensel. He said the first step was to fix the flooring so work could be done in the interior.

Hensel has served the line as a weekend conductor since 1962. He told *The Post-Journal*, that the inside walls were in such bad condition that carpeting was installed from the floor to mid-level of the walls. Paneling and new windows cover the top half of the walls.

Hensel admitted that Sunday's trip was unusually for him: It was the first time he had ridden the line as a passenger. In the past he always worked as the main conductor.

The Hensel family is no stranger to the NY&LE, with Charles Hensel as the senior conductor, and his grandson Donald G. Hensel also working the line.

Robert Dingman Jr., the oldest son in the Dingman family and the assistant manager of the line, described Hensel as a "A man of all trades," making him a valuable person on the line, which hauls freight during the week, and offers passenger excursions on weekend.

More information about the dining excursions or other trips along NY&LE is available by telephoning 532-5242 or writing NY&LE, 50 Commercial St., Gowanda, N.Y. 14070.