

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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HOJACK SECTION GANG AND SECTION HOUSE



This unusual photo of a section gang (gandy dancers) working on the Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg Rail Road better known as the "HoJack" was taken on September 11, 1897. This tiny dirt road crossing is believed to be somewhere in the town of Kendall. Back at this time, section gangs were working constantly to keep the railroad in top-notch condition. This was important as promptness was a trademark of the railroads. The section gang replaced ties, planking at crossings and saw to it that spikes were kept driven into place. Assigned to a certain section of track, the men worked off a hand car which they used for transportation and carrying a few basic tools. This hand car, as you can see in the picture, was powered by pumping a lever type handle up and down. When a train approached, the usual number of four workmen picked the hand car up off the tracks and set it to one side which allowed the train to pass. In 1878 there were four passenger trains daily on the "Hojack" line, let alone numerous freights.

I would judge that the men in this picture have just stopped to have lunch. If you study this photo, you can see a woman in the extreme left, part way down the road. It appears to me that she might have just brought them their lunch as their dinner pails are standing precariously on the hand car. I would also surmise that it might be noon as the man second from the left is holding a watch to show the time. The gentleman at far left is probably their section chief. The young man, center by the front wheel, is Charles M. Vincent who later lived in Holley. It is thanks to his granddaughter Marilyn Tucker of Albion, that this photograph has come to us.

The other photo, courtesy of George Callard, shows the old Kendall section house this section gang probably worked out of. It is now located in the dooryard of the William Behnke residence just north of the former R.R. track on the Kendall Road. Before being moved, it was located on the Hojack line near the Kendall depot. It is an unmistakable railroad building of utilitarian nature. Notice the typical board and batten siding that rail roads often used. Notice also the old brick chimney for a pot belly stove. This was a place to go for lunch or to get warm in cold



weather. Here the section gang kept their tools, hand car and supplies such as spikes. It was a kind of workshop and station for the section gang. Another section house for the "Hojack" remains in Carlton Station. It too, has been moved away from the tracks, but unlike the one in Kendall, is now disguised.

The "Hojack" line was first organized in Oswego in 1870 as the Lake Ontario Shore Railroad Company. In 1874 the name was changed to the Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg Railroad. The track was laid through Orleans County from east to west in the Fall of 1875. The final segment to Lewiston was finished in the Spring of 1876. The railroad was constructed at the cost of about \$20,000 per mile. The first passenger run was made on June 12, 1876, the last on June 1, 1933. The final chapter came to this line in 1978 when it was discontinued.

I've been workin' on the railroad
All the live long day
I've been workin' on the railroad
Just to pass the time away
Don't you hear the whistle blowing
Rise up so early in the morn;
Don't you hear the captain shouting
"Dinah blow your horn."