

Wethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin • County Historian

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L. Monacelli Copy

No. 10

Vo. V

A "HOJACK" SECTION GANG

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".

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 township of Kendall and I might add, it appears to be in better shape than some of our present day railroad crossings. 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 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. For if you study it carefully, you can see a woman to 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 gentlemen at far left is probably their foreman. 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 light.

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 a cost of about \$20,000 per mile. The first passenger run was made on June 12, 1876, the last on June 1, 1933. How it came by the name of "Hojack" no one is sure as various stories of its origin exist. The final chapter came to this line in 1978 when it was discontinued.